THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.

MAGAZINE

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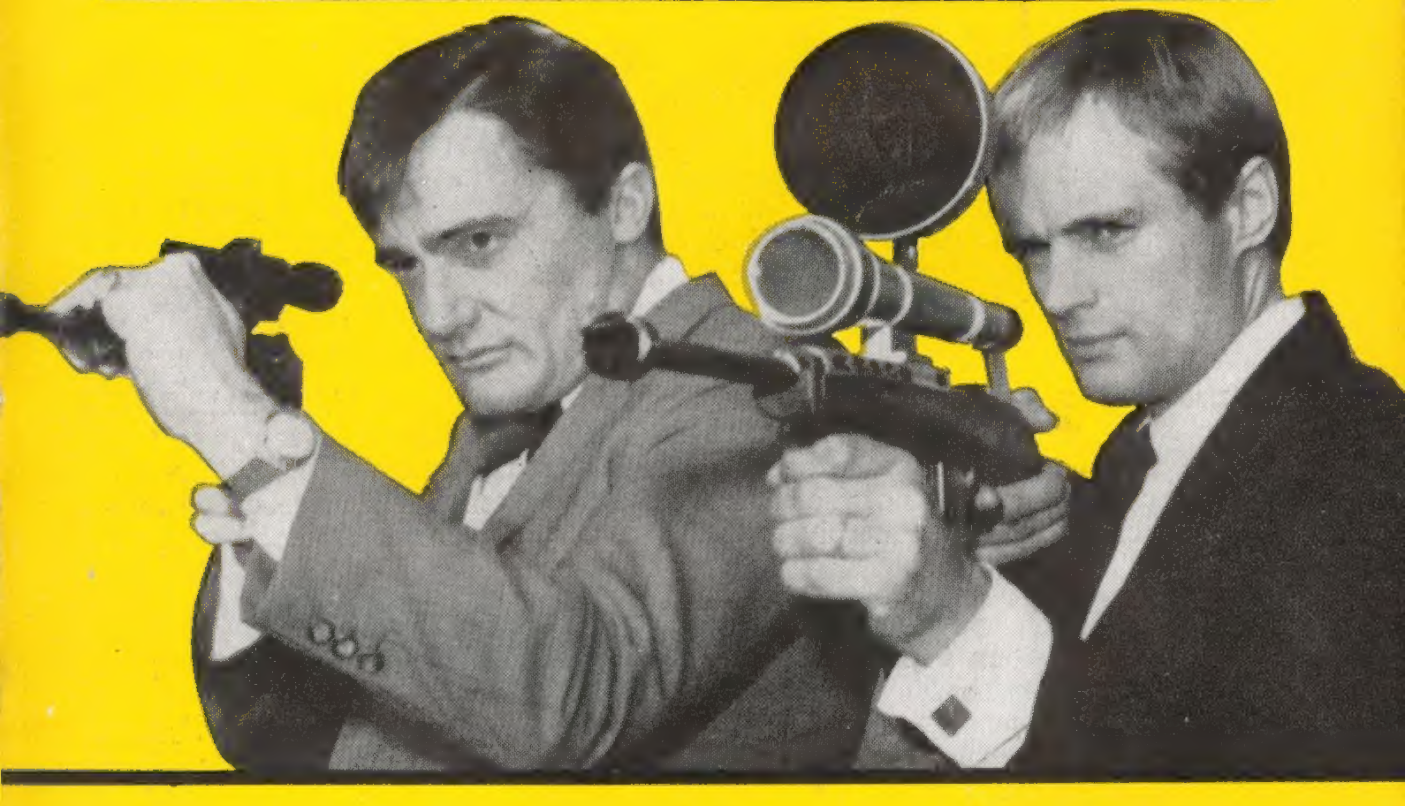
NAPOLEON SOLO ★ ILLYA KURYAKIN



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THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. MAGAZINE

NAPOLEON SOLO · ILLYA KURYAKIN

SEPTEMBER, 1966 Vol. 2, No. 2

NEW FULL LENGTH U.N.C.L.E. NOVEL

THE BRAINWASH AFFAIR

by ROBERT HART DAVIS

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Penetrating deep into civilization's most impregnable fortress, the mighty World Bank itself, THRUSH had fashioned its boldest blow of all—one which, unchecked, could topple the world in three days. Betrayed and alone, Solo and Illya fight against time and a massed army of foes to unlock the deadly secret of the men who were masters of billions one day—and mindless slaves the next! . . . . . 2 to 59

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LEO MARGULIES
Publisher

CYLVIA KLEINMAN
Editorial Director

H. N. ALDEN
Associate Editor

THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. MAGAZINE. Vol. 2, No. 2. September, 1966. Single copies 50¢. Subscriptions $6.00 for one year in the United States and Possessions; elsewhere $7.00 (in U.S. funds) for one year. Published monthly by Leo Margulies Corp., 160 West 46th St., N.Y., N.Y. 10036.
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THE BRAINWASH AFFAIR

Deadly, hidden, THRUSH's master plot could topple the nations of the free world. And somewhere, Napoleon and Illya must track it down, destroy it—before it was too late!

THE NEW COMPLETE "U.N.C.L.E." NOVEL

by ROBERT HART DAVIS

PART ONE—INCIDENT OF THE FRIGHTENED MAN

NAPOLEON SOLO swung down from the Orient Express, strolled across the station concourse to the street exit, and exposed himself to incredible perils by entering a Parisian taxi.

"Orly Airport," Solo said and sank back in the cab as it hacked and barked its way through the traffic.

Returning alone to Manhattan from a Middle East assignment, he was tired and still shaken from a close brush with death.

Trying to escape disturbing thoughts, he watched early evening strollers, diners at street cafes, the maniacal charges of other cabs. It wasn't that easy. He thought about his apartment, the luxuries he was infrequently at home to enjoy, but mostly his mind darted

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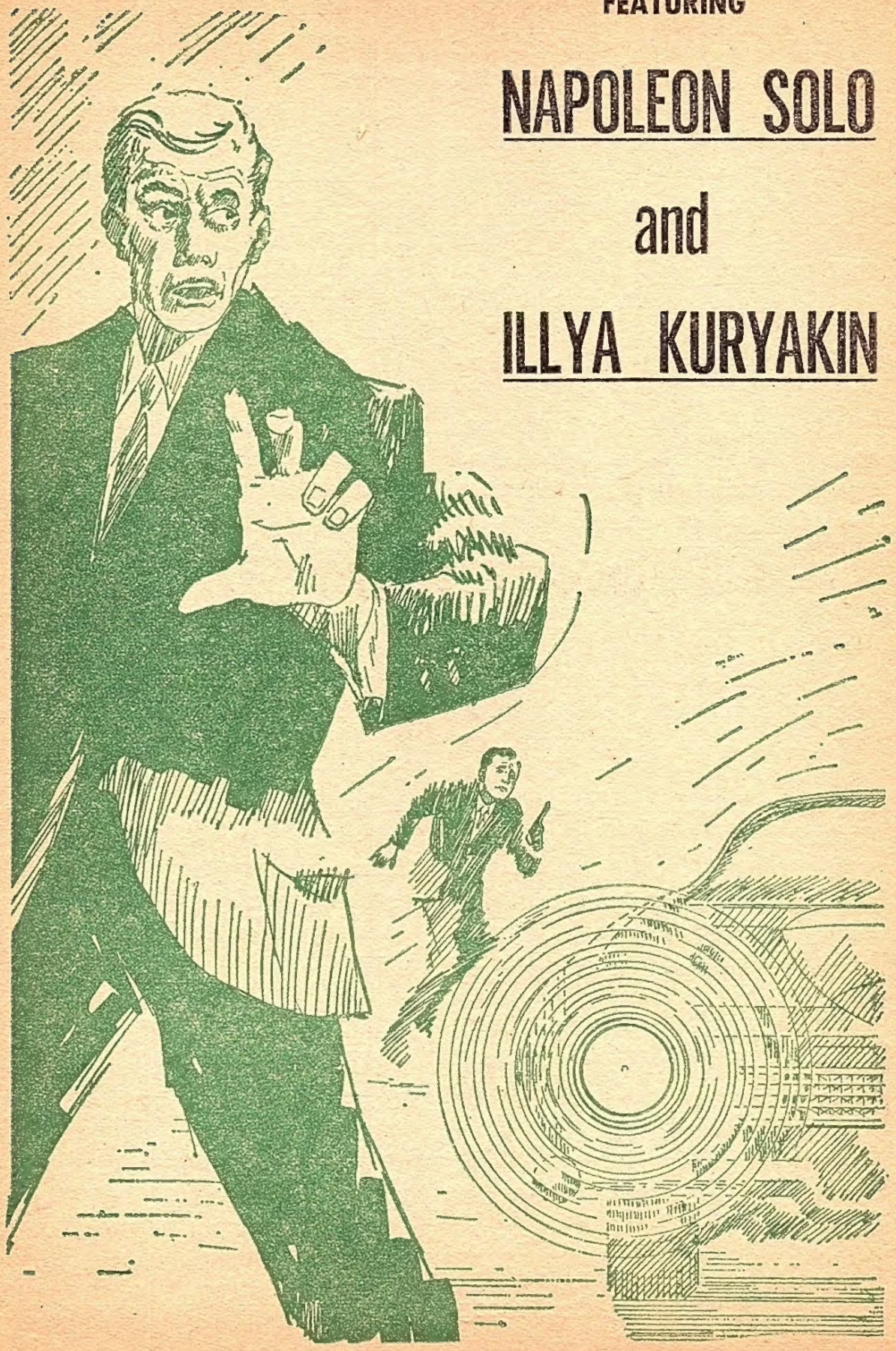
FEATURING

NAPOLEON SOLO

and

ILLYA KURYAKIN



back to his fellow agent who'd been killed three days ago in the street at Istanbul.

Death had struck only inches from him; it could have as easily been he and not his partner. Battered by this sudden impact of his own expendability, he wondered how long before death closed in those few inches?

He glimpsed in a window the reflected faint tightening about his lips. Fatigue, that was all. A plane trip west across the Atlantic, a hot-cold shower, a Scotch on the rocks, twelve hours unbroken sack time and he'd recover.

In the babbling confusion at Orly Airport, his sense of isolation increased. Then abruptly he caught sight of a familiar face and he shoved through a knot of chattering tourists, smiling warmly and expectantly.

"Lester!" Solo called. "Lester Caillou!"

Hurrying toward a door marked *Sortie,* Caillou broke stride. His shoulders hunched as if against a blow. He glanced tensely over his shoulder.

Solo paused a few feet from Caillou. People brushed past them on both sides. When Caillou turned, Solo saw panic graying the slender man's dark face. Solo had seen the same look in eyes of trapped animals.

Caillou's gaze raked across Solo, paused the fraction of a second that betrayed that Caillou had recognized him. Solo was alerted by training and experience to instant reactions to facial expressions, even to lack of expression.

Caillou winced and jerked his head around. His knuckles whitened on his attache case. He hurried toward the exit.

They were old friends. Solo angled across the distance between them, intercepting Caillou at the glass doors. In-drafts struck them as the doors parted.

"Pardon, Monsieur, what hour is it?" Solo spoke in French, extending his wrist watch, a Swiss calendar-clock which Caillou had presented, as identical gifts of gratitude, to him and to Illya Kuryakin.

An affair of Arabian oil and reconstruction money from Caillou's Paris-based bank, a misunderstanding, got Caillou before a Turk firing squad. Solo and Kuryakin had pulled him out of it. Swearing eternal allegiance, Caillou wanted them to remember him as warmly and had believed the thousand dollar watches would keep him in their memories.

"No. No." Caillou shook his head now, refusing even to glance toward the golden watch on Solo's wrist.

Caillou's stricken gaze leaped past Solo, scurrying across faces and forms as if he found this brilliantly illumined lobby a pit of unspeakable terrors.

Solo had seen frightened men before, but never one who wore his

terror as openly as did Caillou. He was pushed beyond hiding it.

"Lester, don't you remember me?" Solo persisted, because this didn't make sense.

An ordinary man might be frightened, hurrying toward the haven of a plane, but Caillou was not ordinary. Solo remembered Caillou had faced Turk marksmen without flinching, and two hours later drank *raki* with him and Illya, laughing, glowing with the exultation of being alive.

"No. No. There is some mistake. If you please." Caillou shook his head again. Pallor underscored the rigidity of his high cheekbones.

Before Solo could speak or lose the warmth of his smiling and the far-out memories of that drinking session, Caillou pushed around him and thrust through the exit doors.

Involuntarily, Solo followed him through the electronically operated doorway.

In the chilled wind off the field, Solo stared after Caillou.

On the concrete runway, Caillou paused for one final surreptitious glance over his shoulder, then ran toward a waiting charter plane.

Solo exhaled heavily, considering wryly the expendability of life-long gratitudes, then discarding the thought. He knew he'd just witnessed a desperate man being towed into a vortex of agony beyond his depth.

The complete novels depicting the amazing adventures of Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin and the rest of the famous cast of characters making up the great organization known as United Network Command for Law and Enforcement—are especially written, entirely brand-new and inspired by the tremendously exciting MGM-ARENA popular television series—"The Man From U.N.C.L.E."

Sighing, Solo turned back, then paused, hardly knowing why he did.

Something caught his eye. From the underbelly of a plane near the one toward which Caillou ran in the darkness, a freight elevator lowered, containing only a small single-seat car.

The car was bright red, smaller than any compact Solo had seen before. Oddly formed, it was round in front, tapered in the rear.

Solo saw no driver until the elevator touched the concrete. At this moment the car's engine flared to life.

Solo then saw a man crouched behind the wheel. Surprisingly brilliant headlamps burst yellowly to life. The little car roared off the lift, racing toward Lester Caillou.

Solo yelled involuntarily.

Instinctively his hand thrust under his jacket, drawing the U.N.C.L.E. .38 caliber Special. He went running forward, seeing he was too far away to aid Caillou.

Caillou stopped running and turned in the glare of the headlights, his face wild with horror.

He was illumined there a moment as if pinned against an insurmountable wall of night.

Hood-mounted guns fired suddenly. Screaming, Caillou threw himself face down on the concrete, as if trying to dig himself a foxhole.

Solo ran out on the concrete. He fired twice as the small deadly car bore down on Caillou. Caillou was like a frantic insect scrambling on hands and knees toward the plane ladder.

Solo's bullets slapped across the gleaming metal, inches from the driver's head. He swerved a moment; then a plastic bubble bloomed, covering him effectively.

But in that brief instant, Caillou was able to squeeze his way in behind the metal ladder. He hugged himself against it.

Seeing he could not hope to penetrate the plastic cowl covering the driver, Solo fired toward its oversized tires, seeing for the first time that it moved on a tricycle set.

The car roared past the ladder, going under the spreading wings of the 727.

Solo ran forward, firing. As the car raced, a pole of light-weight metal sprang upward from the plastic cowling. It gleamed a moment like a wavering antenna in the night, then separated, spinning as its blades locked into place.

Police cars screamed in pursuit along the runway. But long before they reached the small red machine, its helicopter-type rotary blades lifted it upward in darkness and it swung away into the night sky at incredible speed.

Stunned, Solo stopped running, stood with his gun at his side, watching the small apparition dissolve into the haze above the emblazoned runway.

Remembering Caillou, Solo swung around toward the banker and his private jet.

Turning, Solo reacted to a sharp twinge in his side, pain akin to muscular spasms—or a knife biting at him:

It was a knife.

Solo cut-short his turning. A knife blade making itself felt through top coat, jacket and shirt could inflict irreparable damage if one swung around into it.

"Ah, this is wise."

"The wish to stay alive makes wise men of us all," Solo quoted.

He stared into the face of a man hewn from Moorish stone. Flat eyes shallowly reflected light, the way a dog's might. Several inches taller than Solo, broader, in London-tailored fabric tortured into the latest Mod fashion, his goatee was trimmed to a black point and his hair fitted like a cap close upon his scalp.

Solo glanced down at the razor-honed blade nibbling at his side. The big man held it in oddly bulky kid-skin gloves.

Solo said, "To what do I owe the pleasure of this encounter?"

"We wish to talk quietly with you, Monsieur," the Moor said in French.

"Moi non parle Francais," Solo said. He shifted his gaze to the Arab woman close against his other side.

About her sharp-featured face there was an extreme of loveliness and a worldly arrogance, as if she were not only a girl that knew the score, but had invented the game. Her beauty was eye-arresting, but its packaging was tarnished by her long-brushes with sin.

"He says he does not speak French," she told the knife-wielding Moor in disgust.

"He'd better learn, if he means to keep butting in like this," the Moor said in English.

He prodded the knife less than a sixteenth of an inch, yet Solo had to bite his lip to suppress an agonized yell.

"Come," the Moor said. "We will talk in my office."

They marched him toward the terminal building, walking close beside him.

Solo scowled. Unless these two were connected with Caillou's attacker, their accosting him didn't make pretty good sense.

The Moor jerked his head toward an alleyway.

"My office," he said with a cold grin.

Solo shrugged. "Where else?"

The Arab woman led the way into the darkness. They marched Solo to a partitioned maintenance area.

Solo put his back to a wall. He said, "Well, what shall we talk about? Lovely weather, isn't it?"

The Moor stared at him unblinkingly. In a deft movement he transferred the switch-blade to the woman.

"I don't have a lot to say, *ma chere ami.*" The Moor worked the bulky gloves off his fingers. "But what I do tell you, you will recall for a long time."

He smiled ruefully. He shook the gloves, lowering them in one hand toward his side.

Watching the big man closely, Solo reacted too slowly.

The Moor brought the gloves up, backhanded. They caught Solo in the temple.

Solo's legs melted to oleo. Before the Moor struck him in the other temple, Solo was already crumbling to his knees on the ground.

He felt the battering of those lead-lined gloves. His last conscious thought was that he understood why the Moor had removed them. If he'd hit him with those gloves on, he might have bruised his hands, or even fractured a metacarpus bone.

TWO

SOLO SAGGED into the window seat of the Trans-World jet, cruising at thirty-five thousand feet above the Atlantic.

He felt uncomfortably warm in the pressurized cabin.

A compassionate stewardess leaned toward him.

She was built cafeteria style: you wanted to help yourself. Even from the depths of his pain, Solo saw she'd be habit forming.

She winced at his facial abrasions and contusions. She said, "You poor man. You must be in total pain."

Solo attempted to smile.

"No. My left eyeball hurts hardly at all."

She extended an international copy of the New York *Times*. "Do you feel like reading?"

Solo did not answer.

His gaze froze on the headline: WORLD BANK DEVALUES DOLLAR AND POUND IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE.

He stared at the newspaper. What he had witnessed tonight tied in with that headline, even if he didn't know how.

He saw Lester Caillou, a World Bank director, running frightened toward a plane, attacked from the darkness.

Many hours later, Solo carried that disturbing mental image as he left a taxi at Third Avenue and walked in the east Forties toward the United Nations Complex.

He walked down a flight of steps, entered Del Floria's Cleaning and Tailoring shop, in the basement of an inconspicuous whitestone building.

The tailor gave him a glance, but registered no reaction to Solo's battered face. It had been weeks since Solo had entered the place, but to Del Floria it might have been last night.

At the rear of the shop, Solo stepped between curtains into a dressing booth. He pressed a wall button.

There was a pause of three breaths, but in this time much happened in the complex sensory nerves of the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement beyond an unmarked door in the wall.

Unseen eyes scanned him; complex memory tapes in computers whirred, finding him acceptable; inner mechanisms flicked into action and he was admitted into the chrome and steel interior of the home base of the world's most far-flung crime-fighting organization.

Despite its unpretentious appearance, the whitestone building housed cells of bustling activity—from its roof where a huge, innocent-appearing sign concealed antennae and sending apparatus to a maze of water-ways connecting it with the East River and the furthest cranny of the earth, to its main offices where everything and everyone worked ceaselessly to contain, control, eradicate crime on an international scale.

The receptionist pinned an identification tag to Solo's lapel. She smelled of violets, but her curves

pressured against the primness of her uniform, and her smile promised that she played to win. She smiled at his bruises.

"Some day you're going to learn to take no for an answer, Mr. Solo."

His grin matched hers. "That'll be the day."

Illya Kuryakin fell into step beside him inside the brightly lit corridors. A persistent muffled hum emanating even from the walls showed that all systems throbbed steadily from the foundation itself and out across the universe, wherever man carried evil.

Illya was slenderly made, but his leanness was deceptive. Solo had been trained to kill by every known method devised in the mind of man. Yet he was continually thankful that Illya was on his side.

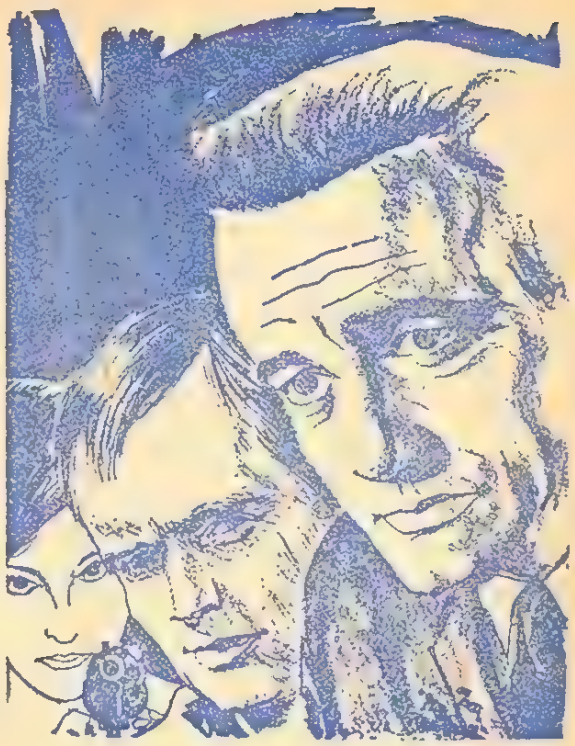
Illya's smile was hesitant, crooked. His eyes were blue, and a lock of pale blond hair toppled over his forehead, and it grew shabbily on his collar. He didn't look like what he was, a Russian-born agent, incredibly trained in every aspect of global espionage.

Illya spoke casually. "Sorry to hear about Mace's death. Hope it was quick."

"And from the back," Solo said in remembered rage.

Illya ignored the contusions swelling Solo's cheeks, discoloring his eyes. "What sort of trip home?"

Solo shook his head, spoke casually. "The in-flight movie was lousy. All about spies and people



getting slugged. Completely unbelievable."

ALEXANDER WAVERLY peered at Illya and Solo across his desk in the Command Room. Cited by almost every nation for bravery and distinguished service, Waverly might well have been past the age of enforced retirement, but if he were, it was a fact that not even U.N.C.L.E.'s computer dared bring before him.

Heavy set, his face a map of old campaigns, victories, losses and pain, Waverly was one of five men at the top of the United Command. These executives came from five different nations, two from behind the iron curtain.

Now he was saying, "We're con-

vinced THRUSH is behind this scheme to control the World Bank. If they are allowed to continue even for a week, they could throw the world into financial chaos."

"How would they hope to control the world through the World Bank?" Illya said.

"I'll tell you what I've learned in recent briefings," Waverly said. "I was briefed by three of the most influential figures in international finance. They were in panic. It's possible, even easy, with the world divided as it is, to cause depression, ruin, even to the three or four greatest powers, by manipulating the value of their currency—forcing down the value of say the pound, the dollar, the franc, the ruble, while force-lifting the value of some other currency to please those behind the conspiracy."

"Why hasn't it been done before?" Solo asked.

"It has," Waverly said. "Currency of countries has been devalued, a country has been forced to back its paper currency with gold reserves beyond its means—but never on such a vast, cruel and inhuman scale as this present conspiracy can be."

"Why would they want to do it?" Illya said.

"In the minds of international renegades who care only to rule the world, the economy of great powers can be destroyed without a qualm. What would THRUSH care what happened to the dollar? We believe THRUSH is behind this. Our computers have selected THRUSH as the only alliance so callously heartless as to spread world-wide ruin, depression. THRUSH could then hope to take over international banking and thus control all nations."

Solo found himself remembering the stark fear in Lester Caillou's face.

"How could it happen?"

"There are many ways that one man, or several key men in the World Bank could make sudden and drastic changes in monetary policies that would create international fiscal crises.

"First, by buying, demanding gold in payment, collecting all gold, until one nation, or one group controls gold, an imbalance of fearful proportions would be created.

"Next, causing business and export-importers to lose faith in any country's currency, so they'd refuse to accept anything except gold as a medium of exchange, is another way to create panic.

"If, in panic, several countries refused to accept a country's currency in exchange for materials or services, disaster for the country affected, follows.

"Another way would be to flood a country with counterfeit money, causing panic among banks and people.

"This devaluation of the money of the great nations of the free world looks like THRUSH's first

calculated step toward the control of world finances.

"One of its biggest threats is to peaceful trade between East and West. It's taken a long time to stabilize it. Commerce between West and East countries has made a one hundred per cent increase in the last seven years. This will be wiped out by THRUSH manipulation of the dollar."

Waverly gazed at his operatives. "In THRUSH's hands, this is money gone berserk, leading to panic, mistrust between nations, especially the Iron Curtain and the free world."

Illya shook his head. "How could THRUSH control the World Bank directors?"

"Very likely they couldn't," Waverly said. "In order to cause disaster, they'd need to control no more than two or three, perhaps only one. They count on shock and reaction to help after the value of free world currency is forced down."

Illya persisted. "How could they control even *one* director who must be known down to his smallest vice by the World Bank and by his own people?"

"We have that answer, too," Waverly said. "THRUSH owns the Ultimate Computer, as you men well know. All known facts about World Bank directors are programmed into their ultimate computer. From these *known* facts, the Computer gives them the *unknown* facts, the weaknesses, strengths, perhaps even the most carefully guarded secrets in the pasts of these men. THRUSH would then find the weakest link and—" Waverly spread his hands, letting them complete the thought in their own minds.

After some moments Waverly said, "Our task is clear. Simple. We must uncover the plot and expose it. One factor THRUSH cannot overcome in an operation like this is publicity. Once their victim of blackmail pressure extortion is located, once that black secret is exposed, this particular gimmick will no longer work for them."

Illya spoke slowly. "But we must have proof, eh? To air suspicions, without proof, would only increase the panic—"

"Right. And play THRUSH's game for them," Waverly agreed. "I see I've chosen the right two men for this vital mission."

Solo spoke without much hope, "Our computers weren't able to supply the name of the man or men that THRUSH has gotten under its control?"

Waverly smiled sourly. "Our computer is not the Ultimate Computer, Napoleon. Using it against THRUSH's ultimate machine is a sad battle of unequals."

"We know nothing more than what you've told us, then?" Napoleon Solo asked.

"We know only that THRUSH, through its Ultimate Computer, can

learn men's weaknesses, can control them, and through this man or men, can control and wreck the world financially."

"Their man might be anyone in the World Bank," Illya Kuryakin said.

Waverly nodded. "And he will defy exposure, because he will have even more to lose, from his own view, than THRUSH. Exposure will mean disgrace and death to him. This is how THRUSH was able to get him under control in the first place."

"Where do we start?" Illya asked.

Solo yawned helplessly. "I could start with a shower and a beauty-rest."

Waverly said, "Hope you liked Paris, Napoleon."

"It wasn't dull." Solo touched gingerly at his face.

"We're sending you back there on the next jet."

"I wasn't that enthused about it—"

"Directors of the World Bank are meeting in Paris with the U. S. Secretary of the Treasury and De Gaulle's finance men. This seems an ideal moment to test THRUSH's strength and power."

"Should be easy, Illya," Solo said in a low ironic tone. "All THRUSH has is the Ultimate Computer—and after all, we have each other."

"Precisely my view," said Alexander Waverly.

THREE

THE AIRFRANCE jet screamed homing in on the black fabric of its runway laced across the Orly airfield. The lights of Paris shown distantly an hour before dawn. Even at this hour the City of Light glowed, sparkling like thrown gems.

Solo and Kuryakin left Customs, crossed the lobby to pick up the Citroen which had been reserved in their names. The vivacious French girl at the rental desk handed over the keys and bade them in French to have a good time.

Two menacing forms materialized from the fading night shadows as Solo and Illya approached their car.

Solo hesitated a few feet from the Citroen, touching Illya's arm warningly.

The Arab girl and the huge Moor lounged against the hood of the Citroen.

"So you came back," the Moor said to Solo in pity and contempt.

"Do you have the fright concession at this airport?" Solo asked.

"Only when we need it," the Moor said. "Only when men like you refuse to learn."

"Friends of yours, Napoleon?" Illya inquired.

Solo spoke from the side of his mouth. "Watch his gloves. Metal lined."

"Come quietly," the Moor said,

standing erect. "No one need get hurt."

"Oh, I think it's time someone got hurt," Solo said urbanely.

Solo lunged suddenly toward the Moor.

"Look out, Albert!" the Arab woman screamed.

The Moor laughed, setting himself. "I'm always careful, Gizelle."

Coming in close to Albert, Solo feinted with his left. Laughing, the Moor swung upward.

Solo danced lightly beyond the reach of the wildly swinging arm. He clasped Albert's wrist as the big Moor drove forward.

Grabbing the arm in both hands, Solo moved with him, smashing the gloved fist into the fender of the nearest car.

Albert sobbed in agony. Solo did not even hesitate. He chopped Albert across the neck with the side of his hand. Albert toppled, his face striking the car fender. The sound was like a boulder pounding metal.

Gizelle watched for one horrified moment. She sprang at Illya, fighting a switchblade from her pocket.

"Don't forget you're a lady, Gizelle," Illya warned, "Or I'll have to."

Gizelle sprang the blade free, flicking it open. At this moment she walked into Illya's fingers, driven short and hard into her throat.

"You left me no alternative, ma'm," Illya apologized.

Gizelle retched, dropped her knife. She sank to the pavement on her knees, hands pressed to her throat, face livid.

Illya jerked his head toward the Citroen, opening the door as he did.

Solo however, tossed him the keys. "I want Albert to recall this evening for a long time," he said curtly.

Illya scowled. "It's not like you to let rage suspend reason, Solo."

"I've never been quite this angry."

"You're making a mistake, Solo. Let's get out of here."

Fatigue and outrage made Solo hoarse. "I think it would be a mistake to let them off so lightly."

Illya slid across the seat under the wheel. He inserted the key into the ignition switch, watching Solo through the windshield.

Solo lifted the car hood. On the pavement the Arab Gizelle remained crouched, watching in anguish. Solo hefted the Moor, draped him across the fender, both his gloved hands extended over the engine block.

Solo thrust the lead-lined gloves over the spark-plugs, lowered the hood across Albert's back.

"Start the car," he ordered.

Illya turned the key. The car motor sprang to life. Albert screamed; the hood was thrown upward. Albert lunged away, fall-

ing across the walk. He trembled all over. People turned, staring.

Calmly Solo lowered the hood, secured it.

He got into the car beside Illya.

"Now let's go," he said.

Illya laughed. "Vengeance is a great thing with you, isn't it, Napoleon?"

Solo shrugged and laid his head on the seat rest. He stared at the ceiling of the compact. "My grandmother told me that if I always vented my rage on the objects of my rage, I wouldn't build up frustrations and end with a tic."

Illya reversed the car, turned it toward the Paris exit. "She must have been a great old lady. Wonder what she'd say we should do about a car that is following us?"

Solo sat up, checked through the rear window.

"Lose it," he advised.

"Your grandmother was a crunchy old girl, wasn't she?" Illya said, flooring the accelerator.

"She was all we could afford at the time," Solo replied. "And we wouldn't have been here without her."

The car behind them made no pretense it was not trailing the Citroen.

When Illya touched the brake at the highway entrance, the convertible slapped against the rear bumper.

Illya raced forward, turning into the sparse truck traffic of early morning.

The convertible swung out behind them. Solo twisted on the bucket seat, watching it. He touched at the U.N.C.L.E. Special in its Berns-Martin shoulder holster.

"How many in the car?" Illya inquired, gripping the wheel with both hands.

"The top is up," Solo said. "Too dark to see. We know at least there's a maniac at the wheel."

"Got a bit of sticky news for you," Illya said after a moment. "Sixty seems to be our top speed."

The convertible pounced forward alongside them. Illya jerked the wheel, taking the Citroen to the edge of the road, slamming on brakes and then gunning it as the convertible whipped toward them.

"Couple of vegetable trucks Solo said. "There's room for us between them. We won't make any time, but it's the safest spot I can think of at the moment."

"That convertible won't let us pass that rear truck," Illya protested.

"Perhaps not on the left," Solo agreed calmly.

Illya's blue eyes widened. "Pass on—the right?"

"My grandmoter's watchword was resourcefulness, Illya."

"I wish she were driving."

"So do I, but we can't have everything."

There was the scream of metal as the convertible nudged at the Citroen's rear fender.

Illya swerved the car hard to the right, kept going. The Citroen struck the road shoulder, bouncing and chattering.

The trucker ahead, catching a glimpse of the compact in his off-mirror, struck his horn violently. His Gallic curses turned the dawn a savage blue.

Illya swung in ahead of the truck, missing its huge right front wheel by inches.

Both Illya and Solo grabbed leather, because at this same instant, the convertible whipped from the left into the narrow space between the two trucks.

Horns blared, brakes squealed. Only the swearing, weeping driver in the truck behind averted a collision by stomping on his brakes, fading behind them as if carried away on the wind.

Illya muttered something in a language that Solo didn't understand, and that perhaps Kuryakin didn't understand, either, words invented for this fearful moment.

The convertible bore in upon them, forcing them off the pavement.

"One small last trick remaining in my bag," Illya said half to himself.

He jerked hard right on the wheel and floored the gas pedal, whipping the Citroen to the inside of the lead truck, as he had done the first one.

They saw the convertible, still pulling into them, try to straighten. At this moment, the truck driver, alerted by horns and brakes behind him earlier, now slammed on his brakes instinctively.

The convertible in that brief instant raced toward the rear of the slowing truck on collision course.

At the last moment it was wheeled hard right, turning at a forty-five degree angle, going off the pavement, across the shoulders, down a ditch between stately chestnut trees, smashing hard into a five-foot hedgegrow.

Illya battled the Citroen back into the inside lane of the highway. His knuckles showed gray on the steering wheel. His mouth was a taut line and he breathed heavily through flared nostrils.

He kept his stricken gaze on the highway ahead.

Solo turned on the seat, watching the convertible disappear in the distance behind them. "I was just wondering—"

"Yes, Napoleon?"

"Where could we get breakfast at this hour? You and my grand-

mother have worked me up one ring-a-ding of an appetite."

FOUR

SOLO AND ILLYA walked into the offices of Lester Caillou in the Paris banking district at ten that morning.

The reception room, done in contemporary French styling, was vacant when they entered. A chair was pushed back from the receptionist's desk. The typewriter was uncovered. A telephone lay off its cradle.

Subdued voices washed in from the connecting office.

Illya wandered about the room, gazed through a window at the view of the gardens and the river beyond. Solo rapped at the inner door.

Instantly, the voices ceased. Presently, a tall young woman in tight skirt, white blouse, hair piled dark and high in a lacquered roll, came through the door and closed it carefully behind her.

"What do you wish?" she asked in French. Her face was pale.

"We wish to see Monsieur Lester Caillou," Solo said.

She tossed a troubled gaze across her shoulder, attempted a smile that made her wan cheeks more bleak. "M'sieur Caillou arrives at eleven o'clock."

Solo nodded. "Then we'll wait."

"Could I be of some service?" the girl asked, perspiring.

"But certainly," Illya said. "Tell M'sieur Caillou we are here."

"He arrives at eleven," the girl repeated, in French.

"She's lying," Illya said to Solo in English. "She's really lovely, though."

"Yes." Solo gazed admiringly at the secretary. "I'd say about forty-five—"

"Forty-five?" Illya looked astounded. "Twenty, perhaps."

"Forty-five-twenty-four-thirty-six," Solo said smiling. The girl smiled too, unwillingly. "That's better, Mam'selle. I wondered when you'd admit to speaking English."

"M'sieur Caillou still doesn't arrive until eleven," she said.

"We are old friends," Solo said. "Would he mind our waiting in his office?"

He walked past her and opened the door. She caught at his arm and he heard her sharp intake of breath.

Her gasp matched his own.

In the inner office, staring at him, stood Albert, Gizelle and a young blonde woman who appeared possesed of more physical assets than the World Bank itself.

The blonde also sported a swollen, purpled eye, and her left arm rode a sling. In her other hand she held a small, snubbed-nosed .25 caliber pistol.

"Do come on in, Mr. Solo," she said.

Across her shoulder, Solo spoke

five sharp words: "Get out of here, Illya."

Illya beat a hasty retreat toward the connecting office door, but Solo barred their way.

The blonde said, "Don't force me to shoot you, Mr. Solo. Because of you, I'm lucky to be alive."

"You don't drive well, do you?" Solo said.

"Don't push it," she warned.

Albert and Gizelle caught him roughly, pulling him into the inner office.

Solo saw in surprise that the secretary followed.

"I don't understand this," she said shakily. "I don't know these people."

"You don't have to know us, Yvonne," the blonde said. "Just keep your mouth closed and do as you're told."

Yvonne sagged against the door, watching them.

The blonde nodded toward Solo. "Search him, Albert."

Albert moved warily around Solo, gripping his arms, pinning him helplessly. He motioned to Gizelle, who removed Solo's gun from its shoulder holster and then retreated as if relieved to be out of Solo's reach. Gizelle had learned one thing this morning: a healthy respect for her enemy.

"That's all," Gizelle said.

"Secure him," the blonde ordered.

"You'll look pretty wild walking me through the Rothschild bank building in handcuffs," Solo said.

She did not smile. "Allow us to fret over details."

With Albert holding Solo, Gizelle moved in warily. She clipped chained cuffs to Solo's wrists. The chains in turn were fastened to a metal belt about his waist, concealed by his jacket. The hidden chains permitted little movement of his arms but were unnoticeable unless one searched purposely.

"Ingenious," Solo said.

"You'll find we get everything we want—eventually," the blonde said. "All right. Let's go. You walk out between Albert and Gizelle. The first move you make, I fire this gun into your spine. You have a great deal more to lose at this moment than we do."

The corridor was vacant. The blonde nodded and Albert nudged Solo forward.

Solo walked between the hoodlums, aware the blonde was immediately behind, the small automatic concealed by her purse.

The elevator opened. The operator looked bored. "Down?"

"Ground floor," the blonde said.

Solo took one last check of the corridor. There was no sign of Illya. He sighed heavily, entered the ornate brass cage between Albert and Gizelle.

The blonde stood behind the operator, some feet from Solo.

Solo watched the floor-indicator,

saw the red light calling for a stop at the third floor. He set himself.

As the operator lifted the handle to stop at the third floor, Solo brought his hand forward as far as the metal permitted, then slapped backward upon Albert's gloves as hard as possible.

His hunch was correct. Albert cried out in sudden pain. Gizelle screamed in reaction, lunging back away from Solo.

Solo snagged the tails of Gizelle's jacket, wrenching her between himself and the armed blonde.

The lift stopped, but before the door slid open the blonde acted.

She jabbed the gun in the operator's back. "Don't open that door—"

"But, madame—"

She pressed the gun harder. "This is police business. You will proceed to the ground floor. At once, without stopping."

By now, Albert had his agony under control. He held his painful hands out at his side, but used his bulky body to bull Solo back against the wall.

"Now, Mr. Solo," the blonde said. "What have you gained with your foolish games?"

Solo shrugged. "A good question. Unfortunately, I have no good answers."

At eleven Lester Caillou entered his inner office, accompanied by his secretary.

Caillou stopped so abruptly just within his door that Yvonne walked into him, and flustered, cried out apologetically.

Illya Kuryakin perched at ease in the window seat beyond Caillou's desk. He swung his legs, watching them with intent interest.

Caillou gazed at him blankly, and then peered at his secretary. "Who is this man, Miss Petain? What is the meaning of this intrusion?"

Yvonne Petain was unable to reply. Flustered and unnerved by this incredible morning, she burst into tears.

"There you are," Illya said. "That explains everything."

Caillou stared a moment at his secretary, then he said placatingly, "It's all right, Yvonne. I will call you later. You may go now."

Yvonne stopped crying, gazing at her employer, her eyes red-rimmed. "You don't wish an alarm?"

"Of course not. This is no time for notoriety. I'm quite capable of handling this young man." He turned again toward Illya as the secretary closed the door behind her. There was still no faint light of recollection in his dark eyes. "How did you get in here?"

Now Illya stood up, finding that he gazed at Caillou as puzzedly as Yvonne had. First, Caillou seemed at ease, master of all situations as Illya remembered him from the wild days in Iran.

Yet hadn't Solo pegged Caillou's

behavior at Orly Airport as surreptitious, the actions of a man 'sick with fright'?

And most mystifying of all, why shouldn't Caillou remember him? If it hadn't been for him and Solo, Caillou's carcass would now be rotting under a few feet of desert sand.

Still, the shaky condition of world finance, of the World Bank itself, could explain erratic behavior, even Caillou's not recognizing him at once, unexpectedly confronting him in his own office.

"Why shouldn't I get in here?" Illya asked, watching the banker. The years had made inroads. The thin face was lined, the hair grayer, the eyes less lively. "In France one can always find someone to bribe, eh?"

Caillou did not smile.

Illya laughed. "And anyhow, an old Arab buddy of yours from firing squad days like me—who would be heartless enough to deny me entrance through your private exit?"

Caillou studied him intently. A look of relief washed across his face. He came around the desk, hand extended. "Of course! How stupid of me! Of course, you're Ill—Illya—"

"Kuryakin," Illya said warmly, shaking hands.

"Kuryakin, the man who saved me from a firing squad. How good it is to see you again, *ma chere ami.*"

He nodded toward a leather chair pulled near his ornate desk. He placed his hat upon a hat tree, studied himself in the dark mirror, sat behind his desk.

"You met another old friend a few nights ago, Lester," Illya said. "At Orly Airport. You didn't recognize him, either."

Caillou appeared to search desperately in the files of his mind. "Solo—Napoleon Solo?"

Illya smiled. "He was upset when you brushed him off."

"Brushed Solo off? What does this mean? I was upset. Yes. This terrible business. So much on my mind. I hope you will apologize to him." Then Caillou sank back, hardly at ease, even in his own office. "In what way may I serve you?"

Illya grinned. "Solo and I had hoped to be of service to you—with your help, of course."

"Anything. But how could you hope to serve me?"

"I'm sure it's no news to you that the dollar, the pound and the ruble have been devalued in the world market. A sudden, inexplicable drop in their value, a demand for gold payments—"

"A desperate situation—for some countries."

Illya stared at him, frowning. "Lester! Those nations lead the world."

"Perhaps it is time for a new world leader."

"Is this you talking? Surely DeGaulle's government knows a devalued dollar will further depress the franc—"

"It is nothing Bon Charlie would wish."

Illya leaned forward. "We've a good idea who would want panic and fiscal chaos. That's why I've come to you."

"Me?"

Caillou straightened. "What would I have to do with such matters?"

"You've gotten nervous since the old days in Iran," Kuryakin said. "Staying alive in the world of finance can be a slower, but more agonizing death than that of the firing squad, my friend.

"We plan to expose the plot to wreck money values. We plan to expose the people behind it. I came to you as an old friend to enlist your aid in checking on the actions taken in international monetary affairs. We believe that through you, we can locate the people responsible and expose them."

After a moment Caillou nodded. "Naturally I'll do anything I can."

Illya smiled and stood up. "Good. This is what we were sure we'd hear from you."

"What else would you anticipate to hear from an old friend?"

Illya laughed and nodded. "Right. You see, I still wear it." He held up his wrist, shooting his cuff and displaying the twin to the Swiss chronometer worn by Solo.

"What?" Caillou looked confused.

"The watch, Lester!"

Caillou gazed at the watch, puzzled. "Yes. Very nice watch, indeed."

Illya caught his breath and retreated a step, staring at the banker.

Caillou stiffened. "What's wrong, old friend?"

Illya dampened his lips with the tip of his tongue. "Nothing, *old friend,* I've just sort of goofed, that's all."

He continued to back across the lavishly furnished office, not taking his gaze from Caillou's face. He reached behind him, turned the knob. He opened the door, stepped out into the mid office of the suite.

Closing Caillou's door, Illya turned and walked swiftly toward the reception room.

Entering it, he heard the rasp-

ing buzz of the intercom summoning Yvonne into Caillou's inner sanctum.

Yvonne sat at her desk, face gray. She ignored the buzzer. She stared up at Illya.

"It's been one of those mornings when nothing goes right, hasn't it?" Illya said sympathetically. He walked out.

The buzzer continued waspishly. Yvonne got up, entered Caillou's office.

Caillou stood in the center of the room. He held out a small card with a telephone number on it. His hand shook.

"Get me a private outside line," he ordered. "Call this number."

"For whom shall I ask?"

Caillou's voice crackled in rage. "Never mind! Just get me the outside line. I'll talk to whoever answers."

PART TWO
INCIDENT OF A WORLD IN PANIC

ILLYA OPENED the corridor door of Caillou's office and stepped outside.

"Kuryakin!"

The name was whispered at him, hissed.

He wheeled around. He was not fast enough. As he turned, leaded gloves smashed across his eyes. He grunted in pain, and so did Albert.

Sickness spread out through Illya from the bridge of his nose.

Rocked on his heels, Illya staggered. He toppled against a wall and shook his head, trying to clear it.

Albert advanced upon him.

Ilya gazed up through an occluding red haze at the pointed beard and old-bronze features of the Moor.

The Moor laughed. "So I get you at last, eh?"

Illya managed to speak lightly through the pain clouding his mind. "What kept you?"

Albert showed him the snout of a Biretta. "Never mind that. Do you come quietly?"

Illya looked at the gun.

"The only way to go," he said.

He straightened. Albert inclined his head toward the rear of the corridor.

"I warn you," Albert said. "Do not push me. You are worth nothing to us alive."

"You keep talking like this, Albert, and I'll begin to think you don't like me," Illya said.

Albert snorted. "Keep walking."

They passed the bank of public lifts, walked to the service elevator.

Keeping the gun fixed on Illya, Albert pressed the button.

The doors parted. Albert motioned with the gun. Illya preceded him into the cage.

The elevator plunged downward.

Suddenly Illya lurched toward the controls, grabbed the lever, thrusting it downward.

Albert pressed the trigger instinctively.

The sound was like a cannon in the metal cage.

The roar reverberated through the well, bouncing off the sump and the roof.

The bullet imbedded itself inches from Illya in the metal. He wheeled around, whistling. "I never thought you'd do that. They must have heard that in every part of this building!"

"I could have gotten you between the eyes if I wished."

"What would you do carrying a corpse around?"

"Keep pushing me! You will find out!" Albert stepped forward, waving the gun. "Let go of that handle!"

As he spoke he reached out for it.

"As you say," Illya said. He held his breath, timing it perfectly.

He released the handle. It flew upward as Albert's hand came toward it.

Albert screamed in pain as the handle slapped across his agonized hand.

Illya brought his fist upward, sinking it wrist-deep under Albert's belt. Albert fired again, the shot going into the flooring. Illya chopped Albert across the neck with the side of his hand.

For what seemed a breathless eternity, Albert stood unmoving, staring at Illya in a mixture of pain and contempt.

Illya caught his breath. His hand ached as if he had karate-chopped a four-by-four, and yet the big Moor continued to stand, peering at him.

The elevator moved downward again.

Illya stood tautly, waiting for the Moor to attack him again.

Albert disintegrated gradually.

First, his gloved hand loosened and the gun toppled to the flooring.

Then a strange new emptiness veiled his eyes, they rolled up on their sockets.

Albert slumped to his knees. He gazed up at Illya for another moment as if unable to believe what was happening to him. Then, as the elevator stopped, its doors parted, he sprawled forward on his face and lay still, in the elevator doorway.

For a moment Illya hesitated. Through the open door he saw the elevator had reached a supply basement.

He knelt, took up the gun Albert had dropped. Then he dropped it into his pocket and stepped across the prone hoodlum's form.

He paused, gazing down at the unconscious man.

"I do hope you won't be too inconvenienced explaining to your friends how this happened, old fellow."

Illya turned then and hurried toward an alley exit.

TWO

GIZELLE UNLOCKED the door on the third floor of a sidestreet hotel.

Solo waited politely, but the blonde put her hand in the small of his back and thrust him forward into the room.

Gizelle and the blonde followed. The blonde locked the door, removed the key and dropped it down into her copious bosom.

"Marie," Gizelle said, worried. "Where is Albert? He should be here by now."

The blonde gazed at her coldly. "Can't you live five minutes without that Moor?"

Gizelle winced. "I would not be in—this—except for Albert. This is not my kind of thing."

Marie laughed harshly. "No. We know what kind of thing yours is—luring suckers into the alley for your precious Albert to mug them. You're in something big this time. If you do what you're told, maybe you and your sweet Albert will have enough so you won't have to rob drunks in an alley any more."

Gizelle walked to the window and stood staring down at the street.

She shivered.

Marie's voice rasped at Gizelle. "Come take this gun and guard him. I must call the doctor at once."

"Aren't you feeling well, Marie?" Solo inquired in mock solicitude.

Marie lashed out, shoving Solo, and he fell upon the bed on his back. "And stay there—"

"Alone? Like this?"

"And keep quiet." She spoke over her shoulder. "Come on, Gizelle. Take the gun."

Gizelle crossed the room unwillingly.

She took the gun reluctantly. Solo saw that her earlier encounter had left her frightened, even when she held the artillery.

Marie backed to the French phone, lifted the receiver.

Solo made a false leap toward Gizelle. The dark-skinned girl screamed and almost dropped the gun.

Marie threw the phone into its cradle, ran across to her. Her face was livid.

"The next time he does a thing like that," Marie raved, "shoot him."

Gizelle nodded numbly.

Marie turned, her face twisted. She placed her hands on her hips. "You think I don't know how to quiet you down?"

Solo grinned up at her. "I know how to quiet you down, too, Marie."

Marie tossed her blonde head in contempt. "Is that all you think about—love?"

"If you've never thought about it, Marie, don't knock it," Solo said.

"Save this kind of talk for women like Gizelle—"

"I like big blondes, Marie."

"You'll never get me in your arms."

"That's too bad. You don't know what you're missing—"

"Huh!" Marie's mouth twisted. "All men are pigs."

"That's why you're so full of war, Marie," Solo taunted her. "You hate love."

"I hate men."

"Sure. And you're turning to vinegar."

After a moment of staring down at Solo, unblinking, Marie returned to the phone.

Gizelle retreated a couple of steps, holding the gun on Solo in a trembling hand.

Solo smiled at her. "I think you'd be happier back in the alleys, Marie."

Her chin tilted. "We are going to be rich."

"You and Albert?"

"That's right. We are through with the old life. We will be rich."

"Albert tell you that?"

"Be quiet!" Marie ordered. "This call is important."

Solo lay silently on the old iron-four-poster bed, watching the blonde at the phone. She spoke finally, "Hello, Doctor. Marie. That's why I called you. No. I have not failed this time. I told you I would not. No, I don't have both of them. I have Napoleon Solo, and soon the other one will be here. Albert is returned to find him now. Cars are coming for us? How soon may we expect them?"

Solo sat up on the bed as Marie continued to speak with deference and servility to the "doctor" on the phone.

"Stay there," Gizelle ordered weakly. She tilted up the gun.

"Press the trigger, Gizelle," Solo said.

She winced, her face bleak.

"I don't want to have to kill you," she said, almost pleading.

Solo stood up. "Looks like you'll have to, Gizelle."

Marie slapped her hand over the phone speaker. "Shoot him, you fool!"

Solo leaped forward, going around the table. He caught at Marie, slipping his arm about her waist, putting her between him and Gizelle.

Marie was raging crazily at her. Gizelle whispered frantically, "Oh, Albert—"

"Albert won't help you now!" Marie raged. "I tell you, shoot him." She spoke again into the phone. "No, Doctor, I assure you everything's under control here."

"The doctor's going to think you're an awful liar," Solo whispered into Marie's ear.

She kicked backward, striking his shins with her pointed heel.

Solo gasped, but tightened his grasp on her. As she tried to replace the receiver, he caught it.

He ripped it from her grasp,

brought it across her throat. Marie gasped, wheeling them around. She was stronger than Solo had believed.

Gizelle fired. Only the fact that she was trembling in terror saved either Solo, her target, or Marie. The bullet whipped past them, splatting against the wall.

Solo caught the wire, looping it around Marie's arms. He spun her until the wire held her immobile. She spat at him, raging.

Across her head, Solo saw that Gizelle had retreated to the door. She braced herself against it, holding the smoking gun at arm length as though she hated it almost as much as she feared it.

"Shoot him!" Marie raged at Gizelle.

Reaching across Marie's shoulder, Solo thrust his hand down the front of her dress, coming up with keys to his cuffs and the door.

"Delightful cache you have there, my dear," Solo said.

Marie swore at him in blistering French, English and Italian.

Holding Marie before him, Solo unlocked his cuffs, let them fall before him.

Then he loosened the chain about his waist.

As Marie raged, he snapped one of the cuffs on her. Then he thrust her forward, moving her toward Gizelle.

The dark-skinned girl wailed at them. "Stay there! Stay away from me!"

Her hand shook so badly she almost dropped the gun.

Marie screamed at her.

Suddenly Gizelle wheeled around, grabbing at the doorknob, trying to fight her way from the room.

Solo pushed Marie against her. He snapped one of the cuffs on Gizelle. The Arab girl sobbed, between rage and relief.

Solo reached out and took the gun from her unprotesting fingers. It was as if she were pleased to lose it.

Solo led them at the end of the chain to the foot of the bed. He locked the chain to the iron post.

"I'll leave you girls now," he said. "I know you've got a lot to say to each other."

Marie turned the air blue with her swearing.

Solo spoke to Gizelle. "She's beginning to repeat herself. Why don't you teach her some Arabic?"

Marie spat at him again, frustrated.

Solo stood another moment, regarding them. "You might pull the bed over to the phone, but you've pulled the phone out of the wall." He shook his head. *"Au revoir,* Marie, Gizelle. I hope you're able to think of something except bad words."

"You pig!" Marie wailed at him. "Are you such a fool that you believe the doctor will let you get away with this?"

He locked the hotel room door behind him. As he came off the lower step, he could hear Marie screaming.

At the street door he paused. A black sedan sped into the street and slammed to a screeching stop at the curb.

Holding his breath, Solo retreated into the shadowed hall. The doors were thrown open on the car. Four men piled out, hurrying across the walk.

Solo leaned against the wall until the four of them ran past him, going up the steps. When the last one was on the first landing, Solo stepped through the door, went down to the sidewalk and walked away rapidly.

He did not look back.

Twenty minutes later he reached the hotel where he had registered earlier with Illya.

As he took the key from the room clerk, he caught a faint shiftiness in the man's eyes. He went taut, thinking that death played with you—it missed you only by inches—it had allies everywhere.

Two men moved from chairs toward the elevator. Solo saw them from the corners of his eyes.

He thanked the room clerk, turned away. He walked toward the elevator, at the last moment changed his mind and strode swiftly into the stairwell.

He ran up the steps. At the second floor, he looked back; the two men were following him.

He moved against the wall, going upward swiftly.

Panting, he came out of the stairwell on the fifth floor. The first thing he saw was a man standing too casually at the far end of the corridor.

He turned, seeing another at the other end. He shifted his jacket up on his shoulders, thinking that the doctor worked swiftly when aroused.

The two men moved away from their posts. Behind him, Solo heard the hurrying steps on the stairs.

He strode purposefully, trying to conceal any sign of panic, toward his door. He held his key ready to thrust it into the lock. Then he thought: even if he made it that far there was not time to unlock the door. They'd be on him.

He reached for his gun, realizing in that instant that it was gone and that he had alerted the two men

who might not until this moment have been certain he was their prey.

He walked faster, reaching the key toward the lock. But as his hand touched the door, it was pulled open.

He hesitated, seeing they were waiting for him everywhere, and he had walked into a trap.

He would have retreated, but Illya reached out, snagged his wrist, jerked him through the opening. Illya slammed the door in the faces of the pursuers.

"Welcome to the Tower of London," Illya said.

Solo flinched, "How about this? Prisoners, at twenty-five dollars a day!"

Illya exhaled and sat down on the bed. "They've been out there for some time. I tried to go out, but they were unpleasant about it, and I changed my mind. I've been thinking about calling the law."

Solo exhaled. "We are the law, Illya."

Kuryakin grinned. "Oh, yes. I keep forgetting. This means we're in something of a real bind then, doesn't it?"

"If you care for understatement."

Solo prowled the room. From his window he saw men standing in the street below, peering up at him.

Solo lifted his gaze. In windows across the busy street he saw other men, armed with guns, telescopes, fixed on his window.

He retreated a step.

He spoke over his shoulder. "The doctor is really mad with us."

"Who's the doctor?" Illya said.

"It beats me."

He moved his gaze across the faces of the watching men, men in shadows, without faces, standing tautly. They waited down there, and he knew they were in the corridors.

"That's the way I feel about Caillou," Illya said behind him.

Solo moved away from the window.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Caillou. It beats me." Illya shook his head. "I got back into his office. I waited in there until he came in."

"You talked to him?"

"I talked to Caillou's face."

"What are you talking about?"

Illya scowled. "I only learned one thing in that office. The man I talked to isn't Caillou."

Solo stared at him. "Are you coming unglued?"

"I don't know. I may be. All I know for sure is that the man in Caillou's office is no more Caillou than I am." Illya paced. "Are you sure the man you met that night at Orly was Caillou?"

Solo considered. Finally, he nodded. "It was Caillou, all right. He recognized me—"

"And your watch?"

"Yes. It was Caillou. Besides, they tried to kill Caillou. That night."

They sat some moments in si-

lence, trying to add what they had. At last, Illya said, "Suppose that man at Orly was really Caillou. Suppose he was trying to get away."

Solo nodded. "Sure. THRUSH got something on him. They forced him to go along with them. Then it got so bad that Caillou couldn't stomach it. He tried to run. They were after him—that's why he was so scared when I spoke his name. Out on the runway they tried to kill him—"

"Maybe they have," Illya said.

"I didn't see him any more. Albert and his Arab girl friend pushed me in a corner—"

"Then they must have finished Caillou off and put a ringer in his place at the banking company. The guys there didn't know me until I told him who I was. And he had no idea at all that the real Caillou had given me this watch!"

"Little trivia that THRUSH's computers overlooked," Solo said.

"How about this?" Illya said, his eyes glowing as he figured the angles. "THRUSH saw that Caillou was going to be hard to handle, so they got a ringer ready to run in his place. Only Caillou broke and ran ahead of time, and we showed up, and that forced them to bring in the ringer—"

"Before he was fully briefed!" Solo nodded. "They had to use him before he was ready."

"Which brings us right back to the *real* Caillou. Where is he? Is he still alive? Dead?"

"That's not fair. You've got all the questions and I don't have any answers."

"We've got to find the real Caillou, haven't we? Before the ringer can really take his place?"

"There you go with the questions again."

"We can't sit around here, can we? How are we going to get out of here?"

"I told you! Try with some answers already."

"Are you nuts? If I had answers, I wouldn't have to stand around here yakking like this."

A knocking at the door rasped across his words. Solo and Illya exchanged glances. The knock was repeated, frantic now.

Illya pounced across the room like a lynx. He pressed his face against the door facing. "Who's there?"

"I. Yvonne. Please. Let me in. Hurry!"

"Wonder what your grandmother would say in this situation?" Illya said. He slapped off the locks, opened the door.

His eyes widened.

Two men bore down on Caillou's terrified secretary from both ways along the corridor. Their guns were drawn. As they reached out for her, Illya grasped her extended arm and yanked her through the opening.

She went stumbling across the room, trying to catch her balance.

"Solo!" Illya whispered.

Solo leaped to his aid. He struck the door with his shoulder as the men outside landed against it. During the next fraction of a second, which seemed an hour, the door trembled, neither closed, nor open.

Then the lock clicked into place. Illya slapped the second lock into place, and he and Solo sagged against the door, sighing.

They stared at the secretary, who finally had straightened and stood facing them, her eyes wide, swimming with fright.

"I hope you don't mind," Illya said to Yvonne, "if I ask you a few questions."

"He's a bear for questions," Solo said. "Not much for answers, but wild with questions."

Illya stared at Yvonne. "How did you get in here?"

She stared at him, her full lips parted. "You helped me in! Those men—"

"Those men just let you walk up to the door?"

"Yes. Then they came running toward me—"

"All right. We'll let that go for now. How did you know where to find us?"

She frowned. "Why, I knew all along. We got a telegram from the director of the World Bank saying you and Mr. Solo would be at this hotel, that you would visit Mr. Caillou, and we were to offer you every assistance."

"You mind my saying I don't believe you?" Illya said.

"Another question," Solo interposed.

Yvonne straightened angrily. She looked even more intriguing with her shoulders back. "If you doubt me, then I will leave," she said. "I will not stay where I am not trusted."

She turned and strode across the room to the window.

Solo sprinted from the door. She wheeled around, gazing at him in terror as he raced toward her. He thrust her away from the window as a bullet splatted into its sill.

She toppled this time, landing hard on the carpeting. She stared up at them, her lips quivering.

"We're only trying to make you feel at home," Illya said.

"I want to get out of here," Yvonne sobbed.

Illya shrugged. "We share your sentiments. But at the moment we're not sure just how to work it."

"What he means is," Solo said, "we don't have an idea in the world."

Solo helped Yvonne to her feet and led her to a couch. He sat down with her, dabbing at her eyes with his handkerchief.

"How come you take all the best assignments?" Illya said.

Solo put his arm about Yvonne. She was on the brink of hysterics.

"Why did you come here, Yvonne?"

Her lips trembled. "I need help. My employer, Monsieur Caillou, needs help. Something is wrong. I

never saw him act like he did today."

"There was something wrong with him today, all right," Illya agreed.

She looked up, troubled. "Oh, did you notice it, too?"

"In what ways did he seem strange to you?" Solo prompted.

"In the calls he made. In the people who came to visit him—people I have never seen before. He didn't know where anything was. His temper, so short—Monsieur Caillou is one of the most patient of men."

"This was one of his off days," Illya told her.

"Something is very wrong," Yvonne persisted. "As soon as Monsieur Caillou left the office today, I came looking for you. I hoped you could help him."

"At the moment I'm afraid we could use a spot of help ourselves," Illya said.

Solo said, "Where did Caillou go when he finally left his office, Yvonne?"

"I don't know. To his chateau, I suppose."

"Do you know where it is?"

"Yes, of course."

Solo sighed heavily. "Suppose we were some way able to get out of this room, Yvonne. Would you take us to Caillou's chateau?"

"But of course."

Solo grinned. "Well, that part was easy." He stared at Yvonne a moment, and then at Illya. "Suppose you start, Yvonne, by giving Illya your dress."

"What?" Yvonne stared at him.

"I echo that," Illya said. "I don't even want her dress. It'll never fit me."

But Yvonne was already loosening zippers, pulling the dress up over her head.

Her hair mussed, her face flushed, Yvonne handed her dress to Solo. He gazed a moment, admiring her in a black lace slip, then tossed the dress to Illya.

"Put it on," he told Kuryakin. "Give Yvonne your clothes."

"I'll just go in the bathroom to change," Illya said. "After all, I'm not wearing a black lace slip." He took a step toward the bath, paused. "You mind saying why I'm doing this?"

"That dress is your color," Solo told him. "It will do magic things for your eyes. Besides, if you can get out in the hall, make the guards out there think you're Yvonne until they get close enough, you can explode a gas pill. That'll give us time to clear out of here."

Illya shook his head. "With me looking like a female impersonator."

"This is Paris," Solo told him. "Don't fight. Switch."

As Illya turned toward the bathroom again, there was a knock on the door. He hesitated, tautly, glanced across his shoulder. "I had no idea we were so popular."

Solo crossed the room. He stood

beside the door. He said, "Who is it?"

"Bellboy, *M'sieur*. I have a message."

"Push it under the door."

There was a pause. Then, "I'm afraid I can't do that, sir."

Solo and Illya exchanged knowing glances.

"Here we go again," Solo said. He spoke toward the door again. "Just a moment."

Illya tossed the dress to Yvonne. "Put it back on. We've just abandoned Plan One. Alternate Plan Ten."

"Plan Ten?" Yvonne stared at him, puzzled. "What on earth is Plan Ten?"

"Pray a little," Illya told her.

They waited for Yvonne to pull on her dress, straighten it. She was still yanking at zippers, patting at her hair, when Solo caught her arm and pulled her close against the wall behind him at the doorway.

"Monsieur?" the bellboy said in his calmest, most polite tone.

Yvonne was trembling, her teeth chattering.

Solo gave her a pen-sized aluminum vial with a plastic cone at its top.

"Oxygen," he told her. "Whatever you do, don't take that nose cone from your face until we're out of here."

The bellboy called again, impatiently. *"M'sieur,* the message is most urgent."

"I'm anxious to get it," Solo

called pleasantly. "I'm just not quite ready for guests."

He stared at Illya, pressed against the wall, across the door from him. Illya nodded.

They timed their movements precisely.

As Solo unlocked and opened the door, thrusting it wide, Illya smashed a gas-pill upon the floor.

Instantly, grey clouds of smoke erupted from the carpeting. The room turned white with smoke.

In that same moment, the bellboy was thrust into the room ahead of two armed men.

They were carried forward into the room under their own impetus.

"This is the message—" The man stopped talking, his nostrils attacked by the acrid gray gas.

The three of them heeled around, trying to retreat.

Illya slammed the door and stepped out in front of it.

The bellhop fell to the carpeting, gagging.

One of the men turned all the way around, swinging his gun, blinded by the gas. Illya waited until he was faced away from him, then clipped him across the neck.

Solo struck the other in the belly, and when he folded forward, he chopped him across the back of his neck. The two men hit the carpeting at almost the same time as their guns did.

Yvonne stood rigid against the wall. Above the plastic nose cone, her eyes were wide.

Illya scooped up one of the guns, Solo the other. Leading Yvonne by the elbow, Solo opened the door and thrust her into the corridor. He and Illya moved beside her, fingers on the triggers of the guns.

The corridor appeared empty.

Wild-eyed, Yvonne kept the cone covering her face, though Illya and Solo had removed theirs.

With Solo leading the way and Illya guarding their rear, they ran along the hall to the elevator bank. Solo pressed a button.

The elevator appeared almost at once. The doors slid open. Solo, Illya and Yvonne retreated as if executing a ballet step. Two armed thugs moved forward from the elevator.

"Sorry," Illya said, "we've changed our mind."

He tossed a gas pellet into the cage as Solo slapped at the down button.

A thug raised his gun to fire as the doors slid closed on him. Down the elevator glided. For a moment they could hear the thugs coughing and yelling for help.

They turned, running again.

Solo pushed open the stairway door. They went through it.

They paused beside the up-and-down flights.

"You go up," Solo said. "We'll go down. That way, part of us have a chance of getting out of here."

Illya gave them a jaunty salute and bounded up the stairs.

Holding Yvonne's elbow tightly, Solo moved them toward the down stairwell.

Yvonne cried out and staggered against him.

Solo got no more than a glimpse of the two men at the landing below them. He swung around, dragging Yvonne after him. They ran up the stairs.

Illya paused, waiting, staring down at them. "What's wrong?"

"We decided to go with you," Solo said.

"That's too bad, because I'd just decided to go with you," Illya said. He jerked his head upward. "Gun boys—two flights up."

Solo nodded toward the exit. "Go out on this floor."

Illya nodded. He held the door open. They heard men running down the stairs and up them. They ran out into the corridor. They turned toward the elevators, but at this moment one of them opened and two men ran out, guns drawn.

Illya fired instinctively. The two

men ducked back into the elevator cage.

Solo dragged Yvonne after him. They ran toward the end of the corridor.

"It's six floors straight down that way," Illya warned.

"You got any better ideas?" Solo panted across his shoulder.

"I'm with you," Illya said. He turned, firing again to discourage the gunmen from leaving the elevator.

The stairway door opened, then closed.

Doors along the corridor were thrown open. Women screamed and men yelled, demanding to know what was going on.

Illya laughed, pleased. The more crowded the corridor, the safer they were.

Solo thrust up the window, swung his legs through. Illya opened his mouth to yell until he saw the metal rails of a fire-escape.

He followed Yvonne through the window to the fire-escape landing. He slammed the window closed. Solo took a step downward, but bullets struck the metal railings near him, singing.

"High-powered rifle!" Illya gasped.

Solo turned, pushing Yvonne ahead of him.

"Where to?" Illya said.

"Up," Solo said, as bullets whistled past them. "Where else?"

They clambered up the old iron fire-escape to the seventh floor.

Illya reached for the window to open it when he saw two men running along the seventh floor corridor with guns drawn.

Illya, spent, sagged back against Yvonne.

"Up again," he said.

They climbed swiftly. Below, they heard screaming. The streets teemed with people, stirring like ants in a broken nest.

Illya paused, gazing down. "They watching us get knocked off?"

Solo shook his head, still climbing. "No. It's a run on the banks, rioting against the government. THRUSH has got the world in a panic."

"It's doing a fair job on me," Illya said.

Bullets whistled past them, the sound of gunfire nearer.

Yvonne whimpered, pointing to the floors below, where armed men clambered through windows. They paused only to fire.

Illya spoke gently to Yvonne. "Don't be scared. Bullets lose their thrust fired up at this angle. At least that's what they told me in ballistics. Hope they knew what they were talking about. Is that really true, Napoleon?"

Solo did not answer. He was already over the wall on the hotel roof. Yvonne struggled. Illya helped her over the parapet before he saw what had struck Solo dumb.

Illya stared. Parked on the roof were two of the smallest, reddest

helicopters he had ever seen, their blades churning as if they were idling, waiting.

He glanced below. The armed men poured upward on the metal ladders. Shrugging, Illya climbed the wall and stood beside Solo.

Two men in brown zippered flight suits stood near the small helicopters, holding their high-powered rifles negligently.

Illya stared at the impassive faces. There was no doubting they were THRUSH hirelings, as were the gunmen still racing up the fire-escape ladder.

"This is where they were chasing us the whole time," Illya said in disgust.

Solo nodded. He glanced at Yvonne. "You can take that nose-cone away from your face now, Yvonne."

"It doesn't matter," she said. "I'm not breathing anyway."

THREE

THE FLIGHT-SUITED men motioned them politely into the small helicopters. They were most gentlemanly, except that they gestured with guns.

When Solo and Yvonne were in one helicopter, the pilot pressed a button. The small seats compressed tighter, locking them in and metal bands clicked together securely across their chests and legs. Neither of them could move.

Led toward the other helicopter, Illya suddenly swung around, lunging at the pilot.

The man side-stepped almost boredly, and clubbed Illya with the butt of his rifle. Then he lifted Illya as if he were a sack of potatoes and slung him into the rear of the copter.

The helicopters winged upward from the hotel roof like frightened pigeons.

Solo fought at the metal bands, but he was bound helplessly. He found Yvonne in tears when he glanced at her. He tried to think of some comforting words, but there were none.

The city, the fabled river, the dust-glinting trees whipped past below them. The helicopter circled on the outskirts of Paris, hovered above a chateau, hundreds of years old, majestic and isolated within its own park.

Yvonne stared numbly downward through the plastic bubble. She gazed blankly at Solo.

Solo glanced down. The turrents and roof of the chateau gleamed in the afternoon sunlight. Bright cars by the dozens were sunning quietly in the drive.

The helicopter dipped downward, angling in toward the lawn.

Yvonne shook her head. "Why, that's M'sieur Caillou's own chateau!"

The pilot spoke coldly. "That's right."

Yvonne's voice was puzzled. "They're having a reception for the

men and women of the emergency international monetary meeting!"

"If I'd known it was a party," Solo said, "I'd have worn a tux."

The pilot said, "You two were not invited—to the party."

Solo stared at the pilot incredulously. "Those are brilliant world leaders down there."

"So?"

"You think you can put us down there and not attract their attention?"

"Their minds are on more important matters," the pilot said calmly. "Banks are closing all over the world." He shrugged. "Anyhow, we've been delivering guests, just like this, all afternoon."

Solo did not speak. The helicopter put down on its tricycle undercarriage on the spacious lawn. The second small chopper followed within seconds.

No one came out of the house. Through French windows Solo saw formally attired people gathered in worried knots, lost on the distressed tension in the afternoon.

The pilot pressed a button and the seat and metal bands relaxed their tenacious grip on Solo and Yvonne. The pilot left his rifle inside the chopper, but kept his hand on a clearly outlined automatic in his flight-suit pocket.

"Get out, nice and easy," he ordered.

Solo followed Yvonne, jumping out to the ground. Across a short space the other pilot knelt over Illya, passing an ammonia vial back and forth under his nose.

Illya resisted for a moment, then revived suddenly and violently. He sprang upward as if catapulted, carrying the pilot with him. The man yelled, going over on his back.

Illya closed his hands on the pilot's throat and they toppled out of the copter hatch. They struck the ground hard.

Illya did not surrender his advantage. He chopped the pilot across the Adam's apple, drove his extended hand into his solar plexus, and leaped up—in the face of the drawn gun of the other pilot.

"Hold it," the pilot said, fixing his gun on Illya, but ready to wheel around on Solo.

Solo stood unmoving. "Vengeance is a big thing with you, isn't it, Kuryakin?"

Illya stared at him groggily. "Where were you?"

The pilot said, "All right, you two. Grab that pilot. Help him up."

Solo shrugged. He and Illya hefted the gagging pilot to his feet and they crossed the lawn toward the side of the stone chateau. Frivolous music blared out from the windows, somehow like a desecration.

"Hold it," the pilot with the gun said when they reached what appeared to be a solid wall in the base of a high-rising turret.

Holding the automatic on them, the pilot edged warily to the wall, shoved a lever concealed in the

stone. A door-sized opening was made as the stones slid into themselves silently.

The pilot jerked his head, ordering them inside.

When they were on the landing at the head of wide stone steps leading to the depth of a silent dungeon, the pilot pressed an inside lever and the wall closed.

"Down the steps," he said.

They came off the stairs into a vaguely lighted foyer, devoid of furniture. A man armed with a rifle stood at each of the four walls. A door opened and Marie, Albert and Gizelle emerged, none looking too healthy.

"Here they are, Marie," the pilot said.

Marie reached out and grasped a gun from the nearest guard.

"I'll kill them now!" she said.

Solo and Illya released the pilot and he struck the floor hard. Marie jerked the rifle up to her shoulder.

A voice crackled from a concealed speaker. It was Oriental in its inflections and quality, cultured in tone: "Until I order it, Marie, you will kill no one."

Marie lowered the rifle, but her face was livid.

"I want them!" she answered defiantly. "Especially this Solo. I will deliver his skin to you—in strips!"

The Oriental voice remained at a conversational pitch, but chilled with its authority. "Perhaps you will. In good time. Don't let hatred suspend your reason. We do not need the notoriety of murder just now, my girl. Why else do you think we brought them here, instead of leaving their corpses at the hotel? In order to indulge your violent whims? I need not remind you—I had better not have to remind you again—that we walk on eggs until our plan is in operation. I'll tell you when, my dear. Until then—remember—I see everything that goes on."

Marie exhaled heavily, and thrust the gun out to the guard, who retrieved it silently.

The three prisoners were prodded across the empty foyer to an empty dungeon.

A door creaked open.

"Inside," the guards said.

Yvonne pressed close to Solo.

"What kind of a place is this?" she whispered in terror.

"I know what it looks like," Illya said. "It looks like something from an old Erroll Flynn movie."

PART THREE: INTERLUDE AT A FRENCH CHATEAU

SILENCE DRIPPED oppressively in the thick-walled dungeon. There were no chairs, stools, cots—not even straw upon the stone flooring.

A deeply inset window, eight feet above the floor, shone with remote light. Making a stirrup of his clasped hands. Illya boosted Solo, who then chinned himself up to the

sill and hung there, staring through the bars at a limited square of lawn and drive.

Illya sank against a wall, crossed his legs and closed his eyes.

Yvonne prowled the room. She shook the door, struck the rough walls with her small fists.

She stared down at Illya. Her voice quivered with outrage. "Why would M'sieur Caillou treat me in this brutal maner? Why would he do this to you, his friends?"

Illya spoke gently. "Don't fret about him."

"I've always revered him. Now I hate him."

"Don't hate M'sieur Caillou."

"Don't you?"

Illya gazed up at her. "I think, Yvonne, no matter where Lester Caillou is right now, it's a worse spot than we're in."

Solo spoke from the window, where he had supported himself on his elbows. His voice was strained with effort. "The party's over—the guests are leaving."

Yvonne said worriedly, "Is that good?"

Solo glanced down at her. "It means that the Caillou on duty up there got away with it. It means the good doctor, whoever he is, will have time for us now."

Sudden screaming of sirens replaced the wail of inane music. Solo pulled himself closer to the bars, clinging to them.

"Les flics!" Yvonne cried. "The police! It is the police, isn't it?"

Solo stared through the bars a moment, then let himself drop within the dungeon.

"Something's fouled them up!" he said in triumph.

"Maybe it was this," Illya said in mock casualness. He touched at an inch-long cylinder pinned at his lapel.

Solo put his head back, laughing in pleasure.

"You've been broadcasting distress bleeps!"

Illya nodded. "As fast as my little transistors would work." He smiled faintly. "I don't like to sit around idle."

The thick dungeon door was hurled open. Its brass knob gouged into the stone wall.

Albert, Marie and three guards charged into the room like a task force.

Albert carried a small machine pistol.

"All right," Albert snapped the order. "You two. Solo, Kuryakin. Let's go!"

Yvonne cried out. "Don't leave me alone down here!"

Illya bounced to his feet without touching his hands to the floor. Gently, he touched at her cheek with the backs of his fingers. He smiled at her. "Don't worry. I've a feeling we'll be back. Soon."

Albert laughed. "Don't count on it."

Marie smiled, too. "This time your cleverness has carried you too far."

TWO

A GUARD OPENED the double doors of a room on the third floor of the chateau.

Solo and Illya stepped into a room of incredible elegance. It left them for the moment speechless.

The large, high-ceilinged room was part of a suite done in an early Eastern dynasty decor, featuring blood reds and ebony blacks.

In the center of this luxury reclined a man of Siamese ancestry. Before him was a low, bone white table.

He sat with his long legs crossed. He wore a silk suit of deep black, a white shirt and white cravat. His face was like ancient writing paper made of rice. It looked as if it would tear or crack if touched. His cheekbones stood prominently and his nose hooked above a taut, small mouth. From deep sockets burned eyes black and fiery. He was almost bald, his forehead high and protruding.

Across from him a far wall was banked with large closed circuit television screens monotoring the chateau. Upon one tube Yvonne huddled against the dungeon wall, shoulders sagging, face pressed into her hands. Lights flickered gray when there was movement in any area.

The Siamese slapped his fragile hands. Albert and Marie withdrew reluctantly, but not daring to protest aloud. They were followed by the guards.

The man waved his slender figure. Solo and Illya followed the direction of his gesture. They saw the dark mouths of guns trained on them from every wall.

They returned their gazes to the smile of the man at the bone-white table.

Illya glanced at Solo, found his fellow agent peering incredulously at the seated man.

For one long moment Solo's hazel eyes struck against the ebony black ones of the man before him. The room was charged with the static tension generated between them in the silence.

"Dr. Lee Maunchaun," Solo whispered at last.

"Ah, yes. I am the doctor you were anxious to meet."

"But—"

"I'm dead?" Dr. Maunchaun inquired, smiling enigmatically. "A violent death, wasn't it? The last time we met—"

"An atomic misfire," Solo whispered.

"Obviously I survived," Dr. Maunchaun said. "Without nurturing any deeper affection for your people and their goals."

"You always hated on a fantastic scale," Solo said, remembering.

"Perhaps you thought you knew me when I hated. But I had barely learned its nuances at that time, my old enemy." He stared through them at something in the middle

distance. "I was born to hatred. I saw my sisters slain because there was not food for female children in my land. I saw starvation.

"I was the youngest of ten surviving children, subsisting on a plot of ground barely thirty square yards. People of my kind learn to live with hatred, or to die of despair. I lived. I persisted. I bought myself—at prices you would never understand—the wisdom of the ages, all the knowledge I would need to buy myself away from the land I hated."

"Only to find yourself meeting people you hated," Solo said it for him.

Dr. Maunchaun gazed at him unblinking. "Ah, yes, we've met before, Mr. Solo. But your partner, we've not met."

"Only in my nightmares," Illya said mildly.

"I'm sure you learned to hate Mr. Kuryakin without needing to know him," Solo said in irony.

Dr. Maunchaun waved his reed-like hand imperiously, dispensing with the preliminaries. He said, abruptly. "Which of you is doing it?"

They gazed at him blankly, as if they did not know he meant the bleep-broadcast signals.

The doctor's voice tautened. "I've been occupied this past hour or I would know unerringly which of you is the culprit. It does not matter. You will suffer equally for this crime."

They remained silent, watching him.

Dr. Maunchaun gazed at them a moment almost pityingly. Then he pressed a button on the table edge. A scientist in white smock appeared from a side room almost immediately. He carried an oblong sound-detector.

He walked close to where Illya and Solo stood. He passed the oblong before them, its thin antennae trembling.

He reached out, removed the cylinder from Illya's lapel. The expression on his face did not alter. He placed the small object on the table before the doctor.

Maunchaun looked at it but did not touch it. "No doubt made in Japan," he said in contempt.

"It upset your laundry cart," Illya said.

Maunchaun met his gaze for a moment, then shrugged his thin shoulders in his immaculate silk jacket. He pressed another button. "I remind you, there are guns trained on you from the walls."

Illya shrugged.

Maunchaun paused, then as if making a decision, he nodded toward the white-smocked scientist.

The man set the detector down. From an iside pocket he withdrew two small vials. Then he placed goggles and an oxygen mask over his face. He came slowly to Illya and Solo.

He broke the vials with the pressure of his thumb and extended

them toward the faces of the two young agents.

There was no smoke, nothing they could see, a faint acrid odor, this was all. The scientist retreated. He removed his mask. He glanced toward Dr. Maunchaun and when he nodded, the scientist withdrew from the room.

Illya and Solo could not move, found they could not speak, though they remained conscious, aware of everything around them.

"No sense gambling with your foolhardy notions of courage," Dr. Maunchaun said.

He pressed another button before him. Almost at once, the corridor opened and Lester Caillou entered. Except that Illya saw this was not the real Caillou. This man, the ringer they'd substituted for the internationally known banker, paused, wincing slightly when he saw Illya.

"It's all right," Maunchaun said to the ringer. "Everything is all right. These are the agents who saved your life, some years ago in the Middle East. I'm sure you won't forget them again."

"No," said the false Caillou.

A knock at the door. Maunchaun pressed a button, the doors parted. A servant entered.

"Lieutenant David of the Paris Police, Doctor," he said.

The police lieutenant entered, paused, momentarily stunned at the opulence of the suite.

Maunchaun nodded almost imperceptibly at the false Caillou, and he spoke as if obeying a signal. "Come in, Lieutenant." His voice was gracious, perfect in its imitation of the real Caillou. "This is my house guest, Dr. Lee Maunchaun, a psychiatrist, and a leading financial expert."

The police officer bowed, awed.

Dr. Maunchaun merely inclined his head, without speaking.

The lieutenant, a slender, dark man, nervous and out of his depth, said, "We've been picking up these signals. We traced them here to your chateau, M'sieur Caillou."

The false Caillou nodded graciously and smiled. "It was only a short in our closed-circuit television." He waved his hand with studied negligence toward the bank of screens on the wall.

The police officer stared in awe. "How ingenious."

"Yes," the false Caillou said. "Protection against intrusion. As a matter of fact, these two prowlers —" he inclined his head toward Solo and Illya—"caused the short in the television sender."

"Prowlers?" The lieutenant straightened. This he understood. "Shall I arrest them, M'sieur Caillou?"

Caillou shook his head. "We have our own secret police to handle these matters, Lieutenant. A matter of security, you understand? We'll deal with them quietly. We have so much panic just now because of these money mat-

ters all over the world—we want no notoriety. You understand?"

Dr. Maunchaun insisted upon presenting the lieutenant with a rare Oriental box, filled with gold pieces, and then the police officer was gone. The police cars roared out of the drive.

Maunchaun gazed up at Illya and Solo in chilled triumph. Then he reached out, snapped the small signal cylinder between his fingers.

He pressed a button. When two guards entered, he ordered them to search the prisoners. The agents watched all their identification removed.

The effects of the colorless gas dissipated. Solo gazed at the false Caillou. "So you passed another test, eh? You fooled all Caillou's friends and associates this afternoon?"

Caillou merely straightened, did not reply.

Dr. Maunchaun could not resist boasting. He said, "Ah, no. Our friend here stayed discreetly out of sight. The real Lester Caillou himself entertained his friends, said what we wished him to say, did what we wished him to do."

He smiled. "After being so pleasantly and temporarily paralyzed as you were, surely you find it easy to believe I can control the mind of a man like your old friend Caillou? Ah, he was present—the precious, perfect host—present in body at least. Only his mind has been kidnaped, Mr. Solo."

Solo stared silently at the parchment face, the sharp-honed features, black eyes, not daring to doubt any boast the doctor made.

Maunchaun smiled faintly. "Perhaps it is vanity, Solo, the need to demonstrate that I, the son of lowest peasants, have accomplished almost everything I set out to do. Or maybe it is because you defeated me once, when we met earlier, thinking even you left me for dead in an atomic misfire. I want you to see you have no hope of stopping me this time. I shall control international finance—"

"You and THRUSH," Illya said.

The enigmatic smile widened slightly. It was almost as if the doctor said it aloud. He would cross the THRUSH bridge when he reached it.

Maunchaun pressed a button. He sank back then, sitting almost as if he were asleep, his eyes hooded like a cobra's.

Presently the corridor door opened. Marie entered, carrying a machine pistol. The real Lester Caillou walked past her.

Solo stiffened, watching him. It was Lester, all right, except that he moved in the strange manner of a sleepwalker. He was correctly attired, his head tilted in that old way he had, but his eyes were disturbingly empty.

Until this moment, Solo had not seen how completely it was as Dr. Maunchaun said: Only Lester Caillou's mind had been kidnaped.

"Stand there, Lester," Maunchaun said. He inclined his narrow head toward where the fake Caillou stood, identically dressed as the banker was.

Caillou smiled faintly, nodded. He walked to where the ringer stood, paused beside him, watching Maunchaun with a dog-like obedience in his face.

Solo shivered.

"Some of your detractors feel you have made a gross error in forcing gold payments from free world nations, Lester," Dr. Maunchaun said in that level tone which seemed attuned especially for Caillou's hearing.

Caillou gave them a faint superior smile and engaged in an obscure soliloquy on the reasons why only gold could be accepted at the present, despite growing panic in the free world countries. It was his first duty to protect the interests of the international trade organizations against the spiralling inflation, the worthlessness of paper currency—

Solo didn't even bother to listen. He was certain that leading financial experts had little argument that was persuasive against Caillou. Maunchaun was not only a brilliant psychiatrist, he was the outstanding financial expert of the far east.

He knew how to make even outrageous falsity sound logical.

He was speaking now through Caillou's brainwashed mind.

Solo said with a certainty he did not feel, "The least whisper of what you have done to this man—"

"Yes. The least whisper," Maunchaun agreed. "But who is to broadcast that whisper? You, Mr. Solo? Your accomplice in international capitalist crimes Kuryakin there? Perhaps our old friend Lester Caillou?"

Solo flinched, did not attempt to answer.

Maunchaun indulged a small smile. "Caillou will continue to speak and perform in rote, whatever I tell him to do, as long as I will it. This is deeper than hypnosis, Solo. Deeper than any waking-sleep you can understand. A drug-induced hypnosis. There are secrets of my poor land, Solo, older than your crude civilization—"

Maunchaun stopped speaking, as if bored with the mentalities of his auditors. He clapped his thin hands and the real Lester Caillou was led away.

Maunchaun watched his odd, somnabulistic gait until the door closed. Then he brought his chilled smile back to Solo and Illya.

"And now what shall we do about you gentlemen?"

"I don't know," Solo said. "But I suggest you do it quickly."

Maunchaun waved his hand. "Don't make threats, Solo. Do you mean that if United Network Command doesn't hear regularly from you and Kuryakin, other agents will doom us?"

Solo shrugged. "That's part of it."

"I assure you I've handled this contigency. Your reports are regularly going into your headquarters in New York—glowing lies about your progress, which I can assure you our old friend Alexander Waverly receives with relish."

Maunchaun pressed another button. Albert and three armed guards entered. "Since we cannot afford to kill them at the moment, I believe an hour in the sound chamber will teach them the error of attempting to cross me with such childish toys as bleep-signals."

Solo and Illya were marched along the corridor, past rooms converted into chemistry labs. They were shoved into a metal lined chamber twenty feet long, but less than nine feet wide.

The metal was cool to the touch. The room was bare of any furnishings. They found that the metal was perforated from floor through ceiling. Faint sound began to flare through the tiny perforations, already higher than a whistle, and steadily increasing in intensity and rising in decibels.

Solo sagged first. The sounds penetrating his ears were like lances. But when he toppled against the wall, the sound on this side increased unbearably.

It was no better in the center of the area. As they moved from the wall, sound intensity increased, stalking them.

It was like some brain-smashing force, relentless, without pity.

Suddenly the sounds ceased, but the silence was unbearable. Solo felt as if his head were expanding, as though his brain would burst.

Illya sank to his knees, but then the sounds started again. They came upward through the perforated flooring. At first they were welcome, now that their force seemed to press inward upon their brains.

The intensity increased, going beyond the range they could endure. It was like physical blows slapping them about. They ran from one end of the room to the other, unable to escape the unwavering intensity of the sound waves.

They pressed their arms like shields against their heads, but the sounds would have penetrated steel.

Then silence again. They screamed against the pressures and expanding agonies of the silence. They almost welcomed the increase of the sound waves.

Neither was conscious at the end of the hour.

THREE

ILLYA REGAINED consciousness first. He pressed his palms against the throb in his temples. It was a headache beyond description—no hangover could ever approach it. But when his hands touched the sides of his head, he

screamed. His head was too sore to touch.

Yvonne was kneeling over him, her face constricted with pity.

"Oh, you poor dears," she whispered. "What have they done to you?"

She extended her hand toward his face. Illya rolled away from it, crying out in panic. "Just don't touch me."

Movement jarred him until he wavered a moment on the brink of unconsciousness. But he did not pass out again. That would have been too easy.

After a long time, Solo stirred. He sat up, his head bent forward loosely on his neck. As Illya had been, Napoleon was unable to touch his temples or his cheeks. He throbbed with pain from his neck up.

He lay still a long time.

"Drug-induced hypnosis," he whispered. "Brainwash. So that's how he controls Caillou."

Illya stared at the distant gray ceiling of the dungeon. "And there's nothing we can do to help him—or the people who are going to be ruined in this game of money manipulation."

Solo did not speak for a long time. Illya thought maybe he had fainted, but it was too terrible an effort to turn his head to see. When he moved even the slightest, he felt as if his brain rattled inside his agonized skull.

The dungeon door squeeled open. Biting his mouth, Illya managed to keep from screaming against the rusty sounds.

Marie entered, accompanied by Albert and an armed guard. They came into Illya's line of vision, or he would not have seen them. They wavered before him in some kind of red haze.

"You. Yvonne," Marie said. "Let's go."

Yvonne cried out, protesting. She caught Illya's hand, pleadingly.

Illya winced in agony. "I'm sorry we got you in this, Yvonne," he whispered.

She pressed his hand.

"It's not your fault," she said. "You are very brave, very good. Both of you. You have done all you could."

"Not quite," Illya whispered grimly between his teeth.

He lay there helplessly and watched them lead Yvonne away. For a long time strange sounds drifted into the dungeon through the high window, even through the walls. He tried to think his way out, but thinking was as painful as a physical touch inside his mind, and finally he sank into a troubled sleep.

Illya awakened in the deepest darkness, feeling as if he were being battered by an earth tremor. For some moments he did not know where he was. Then he felt the rough texture of the dungeon floor, the late night chill, the touch of So-

lo's hand on his shoulder, shaking him.

"What's the matter?" Illya said. His head hurt less intensely now, though he was painfully aware of every movement.

"I've figured it out," Solo said.

"You've figured what out?"

"The one weakness in Maunchaun's scheme."

"You mean there is one?" Illya's tone doubted it.

"There is one. Drug-induced hypnosis. That's why they had to find Caillou's precise double—that's why they had to bring in a ringer. That's why everything has to go on exact schedule."

"Maybe it's my headache, but you've lost me somewhere."

"No. Don't you see? There are no ill after-effects of ordinary hypnosis. It can even be benefitting. But drug-induced. That's the key. Lester Caillou had to be prepared for this drug-induced hypnosis. He had to be destroyed."

"You mean this drug is killing him?" Illya sat up, headache forgotten.

"That's right. They can induce hypnosis, or anything else they want with it, but enough of it is fatal. Nobody knows that better than Maunchaun. They can control Caillou just so long—so many weeks, or days, or hours. I don't know that. But you can bet Maunchaun has it figured to the minute. Everything has got to go right for him until the moment that Caillou

falls dead from the effects of that poppy-seed drug—or Maunchaun is lost."

"Looks like he's got nothing to worry about," Illya said emptily.

"He would have," Solo said. "If I could just get out of here. If I could do nothing else, I could upset his schedule. I might even save Lester's life—"

"Or lose your own."

"We're expendable, Illya," Solo said. "I don't have to tell you that."

Illya tried to grin. "No. You don't. And I sort of wish you wouldn't keep reminding me."

"Death's been playing with me. It just missed me a few days ago in an Istanbul street. Maybe this time it won't miss. I hate to sit here waiting for it."

Illya sighed heavily. He crawled along the wall, and after a few moments returned with a small packet.

"Maybe I can help you," he whispered.

"What have you got?"

"Friction-bomb blasting pellets. THRUSH made. I took them off that pilot when we had to help him from the midget copter."

Solo laughed admiringly. "That's what they were looking for when they searched us up in Maunchaun's room?"

"I think so." Illya nodded. "I knew the TV cameras were on us when they threw us in here, so when I found that crevice in the wall, I sat there and hid my find."

Solo grinned warmly. "I don't know what I'd do without you."

Illya smiled. "I do. You'd sit here and nurse that king-sized headache."

Solo exhaled. "Let's go."

Illya nodded. "Which way?"

"Will one of those pellets take out that door?"

"Probably. But there are guns out there. If we timed it right, we could go out the window with a better chance."

"I'm with you."

Illya swung up on Solo's shoulders. They walked toward the high window. Illya drew back his arm and threw a friction bomb pellet at the window base.

He sprang from Solo's shoulders then and both retreated swiftly to the wall farthest from the window.

Everything happened with instant suddenness. The bomb exploded outward, carrying the bars of the window with it. While the explosive sound still reverberated inside their heads, they raced across the room.

They moved then with the grace and precision of circus acrobats. Illya flung himself against the wall beneath the window on his knee. Making stirrups of his hands, he waited until the toe of Solo's shoe touched his palms. Then he sprang upward, levering Solo into the opening.

Shouts and footsteps rang in the corridors outside the dungeon. The chateau inter-com crackled, and then Dr. Maunchaun's voice rattled through it.

Neither Solo nor Illya bothered to listen. They knew that they were on camera, but this no longer mattered.

Solo went all the way through the window. Then he turned, hooked his toe over the outer sill and sprawled inward, reaching out his arms as far as they would go.

Inside the dungeon, Illya stood on his toes, stretching his arms upward tautly.

Solo's hands struck hard against his, fingers clasped around his wrists. Then Illya scrambled upward, using his ties against the rough wall while Solo wriggled himself through the window, drawing Illya after him.

The chateau grounds were black

in the dark hour before dawn. But as Illya and Solo sprang from the wall shrubbery dozens of floodlights erupted from everywhere, blasting the lawn with light.

They heard the dungeon door thrown open as Illya wriggled free. Men shouted from the yard, from parapets. Distantly dogs yowled. Somewhere in the darkness a gun fired. A man swore, and the shooting ceased.

Solo and Illya crouched in the concealment of the shrubbery. Solo pointed toward a car in the drive. "Run for it!"

He did not wait to see if Illya heard. Bent low, he sprinted toward the drive. He took fifteen giant steps and then sprawled face down in the grass at the precise moment guns fired from the parapets.

He glanced over his shoulder, crawling frantically in the grass. Illya was not with him.

Gunfire sounded and bullets splatted into the sod around him. He had to keep moving.

Something flickered, and from the corner of his eye he saw Illya racing toward one of the red midget helicopters roosting on the lawn.

He came up on his knee, ran, fell forward, rolled over, came up to his feet and threw himself in against a Fiat as the rifles barked, snapping at his heels.

He rolled under the car, the gravel biting into him. Armed men ran from the house. He heard Illya yell, saw the men turn, racing toward the copters.

He reached up, opened the door on the side away from the house. He pulled himself up into the car, let the door close quietly.

There was no key in the switch. He was not disappointed or even delayed, because he had not expected one.

Using a strip of metal, he reached under the dash, shorted the ignition, pressing the starter. The little car shook itself, coming alive.

Solo already had the car in gear before he pulled himself up under the steering wheel.

He saw men racing from the house. They fired with their small arms, the bullets shattering windows, embedding in the metal. The car lurched forward into the drive. He stepped down hard on the gas.

Other and larger cars were already in pursuit before he reached the opened gate and turned out on the highway, headed toward Paris.

He could hear the gunfire back there. But he felt empty, knowing they were no longer shooting at him. They were shooting at Illya. And he knew something else. Illya had run toward those parked copters in order to give him a chance of escape.

He glanced in the rear-view mirror. Other cars came racing out of the driveway. They skidded almost off the shoulders, righting themselves.

With a sense of frustration, Solo

pressed the accelerator to the floor.

Ahead he saw the faint lights of Paris.

He came around a wide curve, banking. Car horns blared and he skidded past a truck. His pursuers had to slow, and one of them went careening off the roadway.

Solo gripped the wheel, silently begging five more miles of speed from the Fiat.

Checking his rear-view mirror, he found the cars on his trail again.

He saw side roads whirled past on the wind in transit, knowing that he could lose the larger cars only by hitting these side roads.

It was too risky. He saw a truck pulling out of a cross-road ahead.

Timing it exactly, holding his breath, he whipped the little car to the left, directly in front of the horrified driver.

He pressed down on the gas, going in front of the truck with only inches to spare.

As he'd hoped, the truck driver panicked, stalled the truck. When he looked back, a crowd was gathering in the avenue, but his pursuers were unable to get past.

By the time the truck was moved, he had gained a precious mile on the men back there. As he neared the market places of Paris, the traffic increased.

But they were back there. He whipped around a corner, climbed a steep, cobbled hill, plunged downward, horns yapping at him. When he checked his mirror, the larger cars were still trailing him.

He jerked the car around a corner, slammed on the brakes. He was already out of it as it rolled to stop in a no-parking zone.

He ran across the walk, plunged into a kiosk, going downward, racing toward a slowing Metro on the underground tracks.

FOUR

ILLYA SAW he was not going to make it to the midget choppers.

Men with attack hounds came running from beyond the small helicopters in the early morning. Their shadows lunged in the floodlights, ravenous upon the grass.

Marksmen fired from the chateau parapets.

Illya hit the ground, rolling toward the sorry protection of a lilac bush. He lay a moment, panting like a fox. Sounds battered inside his skull. He heard the yowling of the dogs, the raging of men, the gunfire, the sound of cars coughing to life, racing on the drive.

He grinned faintly, knowing that Solo had made it that far at least.

He saw the dogs running toward him. They were still beyond the copters. Other men came from the driveway, and more from the veranda at the front of the chateau.

He made up his mind. The nearest protection was the window in the dungeon. He had accomplished

most of his objective. He had caused enough diversion to enable Solo to get into a car and off the grounds.

He came lithely up to his knees. He faked toward the 'copters. When the gunmen wheeled their guns that way, he reversed himself; crouching low, he raced back to the shrubbery at the dungeon window.

He drew a long breath and at the last possible moment dove the remaining few feet into the shrubbery. He stuck his head into the blasted window space and almost bumped heads with a startled guard on a ladder inside the dungeon.

In an instinctive reflex action, Illya thrust out his hand in a stiff-arm motion, catching the man under the chin. He shoved as hard as he could.

He was already scrambling back into the shrubbery, scrambling through it along the wall.

The dogs were nearer; the shouting of the men sounded as if they were in the hedge growth with him. He freed a friction-bomb pellet, set himself and threw it with all his strength at the window. More stones shattered and sprayed in fragments.

For the space of three breaths, everything ceased on the yard.

Illya did not wait to enjoy his small victory. He crawled as fast as he could on all fours along the inside of the shrubbery.

Ahead were gunmen on a small veranda. Setting himself, Illya tossed a small pellet. The explosion rocked the yard, knocked the sentries off their feet.

Illya was over the low wall almost before the debris settled.

He scooped up a gun from the fallen sentry nearest him. The tattoo of gunfire from the yard and from positions above him, sent him scrambling through a smashed window.

With a savage laugh, he looked about, almost as if surprised to find himself back in the house.

The intercom crackled. "Kuryakin! He's in the east wing sun room! Converge there at once!" Maunchaun's voice lashed at Illya in triumph.

Illya jerked the gun up. He shot the eye of the watching camera and then put a round into the in-

tercom. It was almost—but not quite—as satisfactory as blasting the doctor himself.

He heard steps racing toward him along the corridors. He ran across the room, stepped through the draperies.

He shoved open one half of the casement window, let himself through.

The room was loud with people. Illya pressed through the window, but a burst of gunfire from the yard drove him back. From within the room, guns crackled. Glass smashed around him and the draperies shivered under the impact of bullets.

Illya sprang out to the soft ground outside the window. He lost his balance for a moment and lost time setting himself. They continued firing down at him, keeping him in close to the projecting stones of the walls.

As he turned, he saw Albert leaning out of the window, rifle upraised like a club. For one second, Illya stared up at him. He thought in agony, *"Oh, no, not my head!"*

As Albert brought the gun-butt down, Illya fired upward. The bullet slashed across Albert's cheek, driving him back a little.

Illya dropped his gun, caught at the rifle in Albert's hands. Putting his feet against the stone foundation, he lunged backward, drawing Albert through the window upon him.

This effectively stopped the gunfire.

Illya wrenched the gun from Albert's hands. He tossed it over his head. Albert's fist sank into Illya's stomach, the breath driven from him.

For a moment, Illya simply hung on while earth, sky, chateau and lawn switched places. He felt the battering of Albert's fists. He gripped Albert's belt in both hands and levered him upward. Then he shoved forward, driving Albert against the huge stones of the chateau.

Albert cried out, going limp. When Illya released him, the big Moor slid limply down the stones, crumpling to the ground.

Illya looked about wildly for one of the guns, but when his head came up, he saw Marie a few feet from him. She stood in the window, something—a dart gun—in her mouth! He shook his head at her, tried to fall away.

But then something stung him in the neck, with the savagery of a wasp, but he knew it was not a wasp. Instinctively, his hand clapped at his neck. But it never rose that high. He felt as if his legs melted off at the knees below him. He was conscious of being nauseated, sick at his stomach, and then he was diving from an incredible distance down toward where Albert lay crumpled on the ground beside the house. He did not remember making it.

FIVE

AT ELEVEN that morning, Napoleon Solo, shaven, refreshed, wearing a faultless gray suit, rearmed, entered the Paris banking district.

He strolled into the Rothschild Building, went up in one of the elevators to the Caillou Interests suite.

He entered the reception room of the Caillou offices, and stopped, eyes widening, stunned.

Yvonne sat at her desk, as if this day were like any other day at Caillou, International.

He was staggered to see her here. He had last seen her when she was taken away, crying last night from the dungeon. Looking at her, in a smart dress, an immaculate coiffure, you could not believe that last night had happened to her, outside a nightmare.

She looked up at him as if she had never seen him before.

"Yes, sir? May I serve you?" she said to him in French.

Solo approached her desk, studying her. "Yvonne, are you all right?"

"Of course, *M'sieur*. Why should I not be all right?"

He flinched, seeing that she was all right only in her brain-washed mind. She was moving in a drug-induced state of euphoria.

Her pupils were like pin-points. Her smile was too loose, and her eyes barely focused.

"What did you wish, sir?" she asked again.

"I want to see *Monsieur* Caillou," Solo said.

"Have you an appointment? What is your name? I'll announce you."

"I'd rather you didn't do that," he said. He caught her hand as she reached toward the intercom switch. "Why don't we just walk in on him, Yvonne?"

"We couldn't do that, sir." Her tone remained bright and warm—and mindless.

She was like a robot.

He lifted her from the chair, his hand clasping her wrist.

"You're hurting me, sir," she said in that smiling, empty voice.

He saw there was no sense trying to reason with her. She had no memory of him, none of having been prisoner in the dungeon.

He simply smiled back at her, marchel her across the inner office to the door marked *M. Caillou, Private.*

He did not knock. The false Caillou swung around as Solo closed the door behind him and Yvonne.

Caillou leaped toward the phone. But Solo said, "Don't do it, fellow." He showed him the U.N.C.L.E. .38 Special.

Caillou winced, straightened. "What do you want?"

"We'll start with the easy questions," Solo said. "Who are you?"

"Why, he's Monsieur Lester

Caillou," Yvonne said, as if a tape had been activated inside her by the question.

He sighed, seeing that Yvonne had been programmed by Dr. Maunchaun to recognize this man as the real Caillou under every condition. He ignored her.

He tilted the gun. "I'm waiting, fellow. I tell you this. If I kill you now, Maunchaun's little plan will fall apart. I can end it at any moment, simply by removing you. You better think about that. No matter what they've promised you, you won't collect it with bullets in you."

The false Caillou sank into a chair behind his desk. "My name is Jacques DuMont. I am nobody. I was a race-track gambler from Marseilles. I was forced into this. It is not from choice I do it. You will gain nothing by killing me."

"Unfortunately, you're wrong. Still, I hope I don't have to."

DuMont shivered. His face revealed his sickness. "What do you want of me?"

"Quite a bit, I'm afraid. We'll begin by having you call for your car. You are to tell your chauffeur to meet you at the building entrance. But if you say one word more than this, it will be your last."

He held the gun near DuMont's face while the impostor made the call to the building garage. He replaced the phone, his hand shaking.

"Let's go."

DuMont got his hat.

Solo said, "I warn you. I have filed the firing mechanism of my gun so that even anything that disturbs me will cause it to fire. Even if I am killed, you also are dead. You'd better concentrate on keeping me alive."

They went through the outer offices. DuMont spoke to no one, looked neither left nor right. Yvonne accompanied them.

They entered one of the elevators, descended to the street. At the door, Solo checked, seeing the Rolls Royce in the loading area. He also saw men lounging along the building, aware that they were THRUSH gunmen.

"You will cross the walk, get in the car," Solo told DuMont and Yvonne. "Walk naturally. Remember that my gun is fixed on you. You lose, no matter what happens."

DuMont nodded. The chauffeur got out of the car, came around and opened its rear door as Yvonne and the false banker crossed the walk under the canopy.

Solo waited until the chauffeur closed the door and started around the car again. He stepped out of the door, angled across the walk. He moved along the car behind the chauffeur, timing it so that his gun touched his back as he opened the door.

"Get in and drive as I tell you," Solo ordered. He got into the rear of the car. The driver moved the

car out into the traffic. He spoke into the communicator.

"Where do you wish to go?"

Solo spoke grimly. "The Chateau Caillou, driver."

DuMont and the chauffeur stared at him as if he were crazy. Solo shrugged. Perhaps they were right.

PART FOUR: INCIDENT OF THE EIFFEL TOWER

A MILE FROM the Caillou chateau, Napoleon Solo ordered the driver to turn the car off the highway. They pulled into a copse of trees in the hammock below the huge old estate.

Solo secured the driver with ropes, and left him gagged on the rear floor of the Rolls.

Walking behind Yvonne and Jacques, he entered the grounds through a wooden door in the stone wall.

They came up behind the servants' quarters, moved past the garage. At the wall of the house, Solo found the lever which opened a sliding door.

They stepped into the stairway, leading down.

They reached the foot of the steps in the basement foyer before the alarms wailed through the ancient castle.

Maunchaun's voice crackled on the inter-com. When Albert and the guards ran out on the level above them, Solo did not even move his gun from Jacques' spine.

Maunchaun ordered: "Shoot him. I do not care why he came back here. I shall no longer tolerate his meddling!"

Solo said nothing, but Jacques DuMont screamed in the terror that had been building inside him on the long ride out from the city. "Wait!"

Guns were already raised, sighted on Solo. Yvonne continued to stand near them, robot-like, unmoved by anything that happened around her.

"Wait!" DuMont yelled again. "A hair-trigger. Even if he is shot, I shall be killed. Wait!"

The men with the guns hesitated.

Solo spoke in a conversational tone. "I hope you heard that, Dr. Maunchaun."

There was a pause. The intercom crackled vibrantly.

At last Maunchaun spoke. "If you kill DuMont, I shall be forced to use the real Caillou. It will not be as easy, but it will still succeed."

"You know better, Maunchaun," Solo said. "It's all over. You know that. It has been, since I got out of here this morning. United Network Command has a full report. They are waiting at a medical center now to receive Lester Caillou—the real Caillou."

"And you expect to walk in here and simply walk out with him unharmed?"

"I haven't given you any terms," Solo said. "I came back for Illya Kuryakin and Lester Caillou. When you bring them here, I will tell you what your chances are to get out of this alive."

Maunchaun laughed. After a moment a guard brought Lester down the steps. At the sight of the real Caillou, Yvonne whimpered gently, looking from him to DuMont—puzzled, the terrors starting in her again.

From the dungeon, a guard led Illya.

Solo winced, seeing his partner. Illya's face was battered and bruised from the beatings inflicted upon him since dawn. He dragged his feet when he walked. His wrists were linked in handcuffs chained to a band about his waist.

Maunchaun laughed again. "You do not look very large, or very awesome on my television screen, Mr. Solo."

Solo continued staring at Illya's swollen face. He did not answer. Involuntarily he jabbed the mouth of his gun into DuMont's spine. The impostor screamed.

"Do you think I am going to let you live, Solo?" Maunchaun's voice persisted. "You, or Caillou —any of you? If as you suggest you have destroyed my plan to use the World Bank as an instrument of world panic, what have I to gain by permitting you to live to testify against me?"

"You've one gamble, Doctor," Solo said. "You know how long Lester Caillou will live on this drug you've been feeding him."

"Indeed I do."

"I'm willing to gamble with you," Solo said. "I'll exchange DuMont for the real Lester Caillou, if you let us out of here."

"Why should I?"

"There is a chance Caillou won't live to get to the medical center. There is a chance he won't recover sufficiently to testify against you. That's your only chance."

"And all I have to do is to allow you four people safe conduct from this house?"

"I've bad news for you, Doctor. If we are not out of here in—" Solo checked his watch, "—in thirty more minutes, operatives from

United Network Command and the French police will move in here. We're giving you thirty minutes, because if this matter can be settled without further notoriety further panic can be avoided. I thought you'd be interested in thirty minutes. A man like you should be able to do many things in thirty minutes."

There was that pause, vibrant in the silence. Finally, Maunchaun said, almost pleasantly, "Let them go. All guards, let them go."

Holding Lester Caillou's arm, Solo retreated. Yvonne moved beside Illya. They went up the steps, through the door in the wall to the yard.

Solo was not deceived that Maunchaun had surrendered so docilely.

The safest plan for Maunchaun would be to permit them to leave, to clear out of the chateau in his midget copters before the world fell in on him.

By now Solo knew that Maunchaun was not interested in safety. His imagination moved through vast spaces, and peril was part of his existence.

He said, "The 'copters. Walk at an angle as if we were going past them toward the gate. At my signal, run to the nearest one."

They walked across the lawn in the sun. Nothing stirred inside the chateau or out of it. Not even a bird whistled in the trees. There was no breeze. It was as if everything held its breath, waiting for Dr. Maunchaun's next move.

Solo felt as if he were wearing a large target in the middle of his back. Maunchaun was not going to let them get Caillou to the waiting physicians—not going to let them live, even though his gigantic fiscal plot had been destroyed.

"Now!" Solo said.

They ran toward the nearest chopper. Caillou staggered.

Fearful, Solo glanced at him. He slipped his arm around him, supporting him. Ahead of them, Yvonne and Illya scrambled into the copter.

Solo half lifted Caillou. He crawled into the bucket seat at the controls. Illya managed to reach his manacled arms out and close the plastic door.

Solo started the engine, revving the motor. Men ran from the house, through the dooors, the grounds filling with them. They carried guns.

Solo engaged the controls; the blades whirled. The small whirlybird swung upward like a frantic swan.

Solo tossed Illya the handcuff keys he'd taken from Marie in that side-street hotel. Illya unlocked the cuffs, let them dangle at his waist. He checked the 'copter, found a machine pistol, a box of friction-bomb pellets.

Caillou sagged silently against a bulkhead.

Yvonne shivered, staring at

Caillou. Shock and fear were at battle with the effects of the drugs inside her.

Solo stared downward. The men on the lawn outside the chateau looked like ants. They stood unmoving on the grass staring upward.

No one made any move to pursue them.

"This was too easy," Solo said aloud.

The speaker on the helicopter radio crackled. "I wondered when this would occur to you, Mr. Solo," Maunchaun's voice taunted.

"I thought maybe you were truly intelligent, Doctor," Solo answered.

"I am intelligent, Solo. It is you who is naive. Do you think I can let any of you live?"

"I think you can now. It's over."

"Oh, no, Mr. Solo. With you and the real Caillou aboard that chopper, it has really just begun. After all, Mr. Solo, world domination is at stake here. Could I afford to be outwitted by Napoleon Solo?"

"You're wasting your last thirty minutes, Doctor," Solo reminded him.

"Don't worry about my thirty minutes, Mr. Solo. Worry about yours. Look around you. Secure? Or do you finally see that I have the four of you exactly where I want you?"

"I feel pretty good."

"Mr. Solo, think about it. If you were to die now—the four of you—could I not have Jacques Du-Mont assume Caillou's identity? Could he not agree with all the articles in your report to your agency? Could we not all regret the death of the two agents of U.N.C.L.E. and the *false* Caillou?

"After all, Solo, my plan is deep into fruition—many international bankers agree with my theories—as advanced through the brain-washed Monsieur Caillou. Do you begin to understand?"

Suddenly the midget helicopter vibrated from bow to stern. Yvonne screamed. Only Caillou, sprawled on the small floor space, did not react.

Solo fought the controls. Nothing happened.

The copter veered abruptly, flying upward at a furious burst of speed.

It continued in a roll, going all the way over.

Solo worked the foot levers, the hand controls. The small plane trembled, finally righting itself, but not through anything Solo was able to do.

"Do you begin to understand?" Maunchaun's voice taunted. "You are on radio control now, Solo. That is another wonderful feature of our midget birds. They can be flown without pilots. I am at this moment directing your flight . . . As you have been every moment in these past days, you are completely at my mercy."

Solo did not answer. He looked around the small cockpit.

Maunchaun's voice taunted, "Looking for parachutes, Mr. Solo?"

Illya lifted the two packs silently.

"Only two of them?" Maunchaun's voice was filled with mock concern. "Will only two of you be able to leap from the copter, Solo? Who will be saved? Caillou? Will he live long enough to get to earth? And if he does, long enough to get to medical aid? The secretary? You? Kuryakin?"

The midget helicopter held a steady course, now that Dr. Maunchaun had demonstrated his complete mastery of it.

Ahead, Solo saw the buildings of Paris, near and yet impossibly removed, as if on another planet.

He abandoned any attempt to control the chopper.

The radio speaker crackled. "Do you see the Eiffel Tower ahead, Solo?" Maunchaun's taunting voice inquired.

"I see it."

"I have electronically set your helicopter on a collision course with the upper stories of the tower, Solo. The course is locked. It cannot be altered. I need no longer concern myself with you or your fate. The copter will be smashed—friction-bomb pellets are aboard, will demolish further the ship and you people. You will be destroyed beyond any hope of identification by any chemical or other scientific means. Goodbye, Mr. Solo. You waged a persistent battle."

Yvonne was pressed against Illya's shoulder. Her body shook.

Solo said. "Yvonne."

She turned, seeing he held one of the chute packs ready to harness it upon her.

"Oh, no," she whispered. "It does not matter about me. I am nobody."

"I got you in this," Solo said. "I'm getting you out of it. Now. Hurry! We've got no time to argue about it."

Her head tilted. She stared beyond his shoulder at the Eifel Tower taking black shape directly ahead in the distance, seeming to hurtle toward them on its collision course.

She looked at Illya's battered face, at Lester slumped beside her, at Solo. Finally, her eyes brimming with tears, she nodded.

Solo harnessed the chute on Yvonne. He pushed open the door of the copter. She hung a moment on the brink. Then she hurtled outward, plunging downward.

Solo and Illya stared after her a moment as she careened over and over in space. Suddenly the lines of her chute streamed outward on the wind, the striped nylon whipped in the wind. Her skirts and the chute filled with air, and she went floating, sails and skirts like bright balloons in the sunlight.

The radio speaker crackled. "Solo? Are you still there, or have you abandoned the ship like a good little rat?"

"I'm here," Solo said.

"Why don't you jump? What's left, Solo? One chute? For three? You have little time left to choose the one worthy to live." Maunchaun's voice dripped sarcasm. "It will be a fearful, fiery death. You might live for some moments after the copter strikes the girders of the tower. I don't envy you your death, Solo."

Solo said nothing.

He slipped his arms through the shoulder straps of the chute. He nodded at Illya, who worked swiftly with him, tightening until he was securely harnessed in it.

"Minutes left to you now, Solo." Maunchaun taunted.

Solo didn't even bother listening any more. He reached out, took the handcuffs chain-linked to the metal band at Illya's waist. He clicked one handcuff about Lester Caillou, the other to his own wrist. He secured his hand to the release clip of the chute, thrust open the copter door.

"Hang on," he said.

Caillou and Illya clasped their arms about him. For one moment Solo stared at the huge black tower erupting through the trees toward them.

Below, the town stirred, aware of the small machine bearing toward the tower.

Solo thrust outward, leaping into the air, jerking on the ripcord at that instant.

As they leaped, Illya threw the handful of friction-bomb pellets with all his strength against the instrument panel.

For one moment longer the small plane held its unwavering course directly toward the upper reaches of the Eiffel Tower. Then it erupted in mid-air, fragmenting in blooms and plumes of fire. The parts of the plane flew wildly, like bright pinwheels.

The chute opened, jerking hard against the weight of the three men. It puffed tense and filled with air, staggered aimlessly across the atmosphere, dancing, bobbling, and finally righting itself, plummetting downward.

Solo heard Illya's relieved laughter. Then he heard Caillou laugh, too, and his heart leaped

because he knew for the first time that Caillou would make it—to the waiting doctors and to full recovery.

They had won.

Solo heard more wild laughter, and realized, almost with a sense of shock, that the laughing was his own. It poured out of him.

They rocked earthward, laughing in triumph and the sheer wonder of being alive.

Up ahead the huge tower rose darkly against the sky.

On the concourse below, an incredible crowd was gathering form, coming from everywhere, converging beneath them. Staring down, they saw that most of them were tourists, with cameras clicking.

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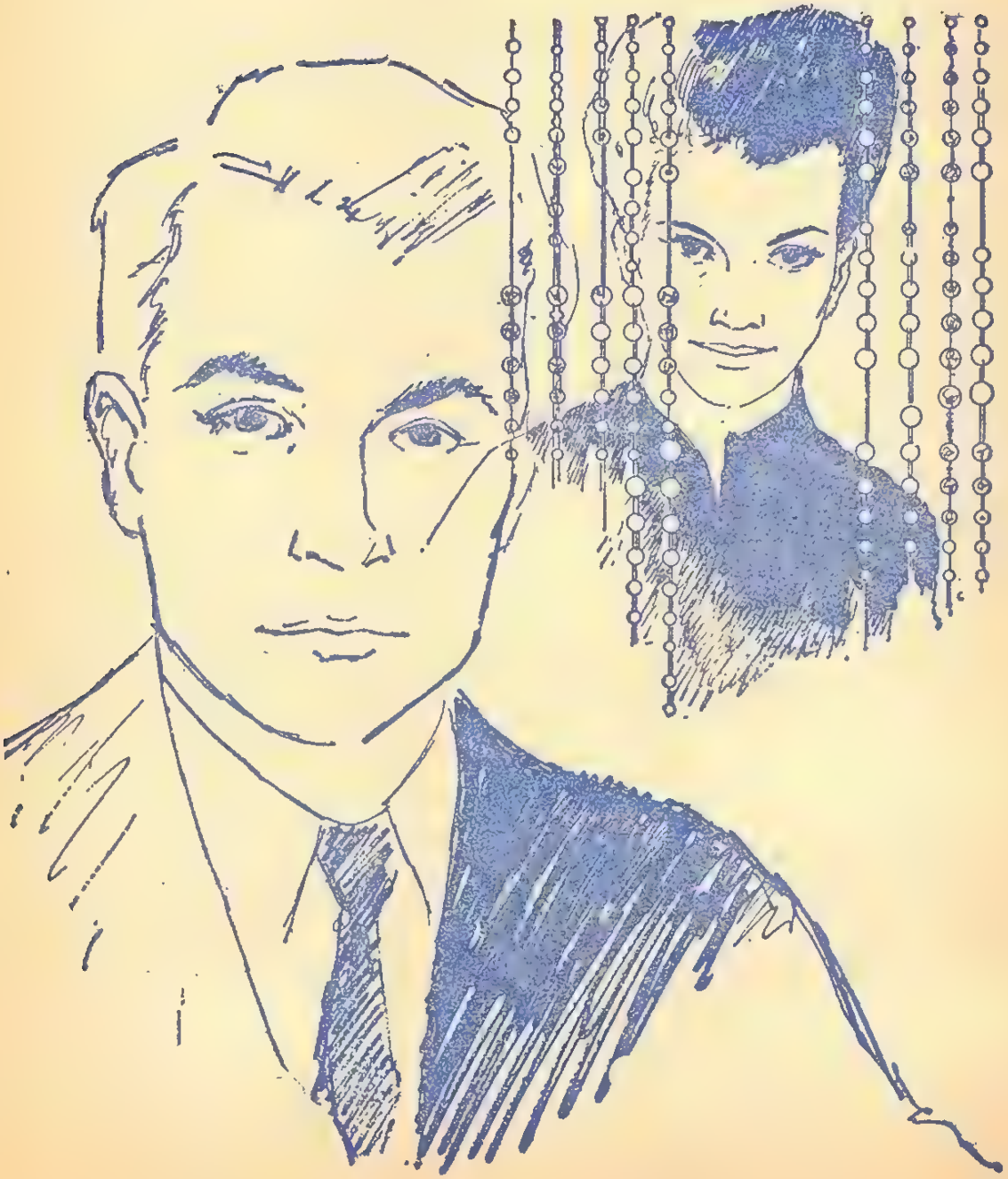

MURDER in SAIGON

Somewhere in troubled Saigon lay the key to a deadly riddle. And somewhere a lone Yank had to follow a trail of blood and danger—even into Red China itself . . .

by TOM H. MORIARTY

DRIVING EAST on Sunset Boulevard that fall morning, Joe Rodriguez, rookie plain-clothesman of Hollywood Division, LAPD, stopped for a traffic light at Vermont Avenue.

He glanced to his right to catch the headline of the *Times* in its coin rack. Vietnam again, he saw. On again, off again, the international chess game of world powers.

Jose Juan Rodriguez did not know it, but he had read a headline destined to change his life.

NEW SAIGON SHAKEUP, the headline stated.

An envelope awaited him when he reached his apartment on the fringes of Chavez Ravine. The letter, marked "Urgent—Deliver at once," was from the Department of Defense, Pentagon, Washington, D.C. and addressed to Sergeant Jose J. Rodriguez, U.S. Army Reserve.

Joe read the first sentence, "You will proceed to Fort Ord, California, reporting to Adjutant,

Counter Intelligence Corps, Detachment XN-1 . . ."

The buckwheat batter and the breakfast steak, ready for the frying pan, would have to wait. He plunked down at the kitchen table and studied out the code symbols of prior reserve service which had led to his card falling out of the IBM hopper.

Camp Roberts, National Guard. He had served there in a summer encampment seven years ago, after graduating from East Los Angeles Junior College. Then had followed years of monthly meetings, during which time he asked for transfer to the Ready Reserve of Army CIC. Of the eight years reserve duty then required by law, Rodriguez had notched up seven. Now he was twenty-seven years old. He considered with a chill that he had not made sergeant of police yet; he was really stymied.

An underlined paragraph in the orders explained the abrupt call-up. Under Confidential, he read, ". . . a critical shortage exists in your specialized category at USOM . . ." USOM translated into United States Operations Mission, the chief military agency in South Vietnam.

Thus it came about that when the sun was setting on that same fall day, Rodriguez puffed away on one of Lieutenant Fred Bennett's best cigars, as he tooled up Highway 101 in a rental car.

The young man with the Spanish features and the flat set of eyes, mused with pleasure on the farewell back-slapping in the squad room at Hollywood Division.

The adjutant at Fort Ord did not have such a friendly viewpoint of the occasion.

He said, "You got one day to draw clothing equipment at Quartermaster, go through physical and dental lines, shot line, credentials. Report back eighteen hundred hours for bus to Military Air Lift at Travis Air Force Base."

"No refresher course first?" said Rodriguez.

"You should be in good enough shape, soldier, after chasing movie broads around the Strip."

Near midnight, the young detective boarded a C-123 in company with dozens of green-clads and khaki-clads like himself, and flew west by south, halfway around the globe.

. . . IN THE gold and green plain of the Mekong Delta, Saigon's Tan Son Nhuit airport roared with the traffic of a super Kennedy Field when the transport touched down.

A major in khaki bush jacket called for Detachment XN-1 over a bullhorn on the apron. Rodriguez noted that this major wore the castle insignia of engineers, the same misleading markings as the detachment of twenty-five men had been issued at Fort Ord.

The major himself dressed up the line of the detachment and

then called five names off the roster, including that of Sergeant Jose J. Rodriguez. He instructed the five to rendezvous nearby. The other men departed in a six-by-six truck under command of a Corporal Finn.

Alone with this picked squad, the major said, "My name is Cazenave. Rene Cazenave. A reservist like yourself. In private life I'm a police detective in San Francisco. Now you know we all speak the same language. I've had your personnel records for a week, so I'm going to make some assignments now that can't wait on ceremony."

The major moved around the revetment slope, where the thunder of jet engines softened somewhat. He pulled out a sheaf of hundred-dollar bills from his wallet and placed one in each soldier's hands.

"Examine this currency," he said. "Would you say it was good? Or phony?"

Rodriguez felt the linen-like texture of the bill and studied the quality of the engraved portrait of Benjamin Franklin in the middle. He also judged numbers and signatures as to familiarity of placement and color of ink. The hundred-dollar bill seemed entirely okay to Rodriguez. He was first among the men to say as much. Some hesitated, but at length all approved the currency as good legal tender and not counterfeited.

"You are right," said Major Cazenave. "The money is good. Any bank in the world would accept it. Now look again at the name of the Secretary of the Treasury signing these brand new C-notes."

Each bill appeared fresh off the presses. Yet each had the signature of G. M. Humphrey, the first Secretary of the Treasury in the Eisenhower Administration, more then ten years ago.

"The official money here is the piaster," Cazenave explained, "but Uncle Sam's printed currency is still regarded as gold and more in demand than the piaster—particularly by the shots who run this country politically and business-wise. From time to time, American currency shows up in volume, and when that happens it is most curiously of this kind you hold. Notes printed a long time ago and obviously never circulated in the stream of business. Clean, brand new bills.

"The local bankers assure us they have no such stock in their vaults. Nor does the South Vietnam government admit to any hidden fund. The character of the government money expert making the statement is the best. Finally, our own people back home know of no such a cache of good but old bills.

"In short, your first job will be to help us to work up to the source of ownership. If somebody has a huge treasure of these bills, he is exceedingly dangerous to U.S. interests. That person can corner a product, for example, and cause inflation and create a black market in it. He can also bribe bombings, sabotage,

and civic violence. Why? Because the people of Southeast Asia are hungry for United States money. This has been so ever since World War Two, when India and China hoarded our currency as a hedge against devaluation of their own paper. Okay, men. Line up your bunks in town and we'll get cracking."

Rodriguez smiled, saying, "It's like old times, Major, when we would stake out a counterfeiter to help the T-men."

"Now we're the T-men," Cazenave said, "with a dash of FBI and a seasoning of private-eye thrown in."

The heat of morning had now soared into oven-blast intensity, Rodriguez and his four companions were glad to climb into a personnel truck with their gear, and rattle in towards Saigon and the enlisted men's barracks of Le Loi Nuk.

Flame trees highlighted the course enroute along Cach Mang Street. Crowds of brown kids waved. High school girls in white dresses screamed out an Oriental welcome along the way. The attractive city, though in a turmoil of popping motorcycles and angry cyclists, reminded Rodriguez of the Wilshire Boulevard bend in Beverly Hills, where in every direction are mixed vistas of lanai apartments, busy boulevards, tropical trees and shrubs.

They called Saigon The Pearl of the Orient and The Paris of the East. Rodriguez was ready to agree on first view. He knew, though, from a previous orientation lecture, that Saigon, for all of its exotic beauty, was also a breeding nest of spies, traitors, and two-way opportunists. The worst elements of Southeast Asia had fled to its armed protection long ago.

However, for the fighting Americans and Australian-New Zealand-Korean allies who daily played dice with death in the guerrilla actions north, west, south, and east of the city, Saigon remained a heavenly pass town. It was alive with the excitement of young stuff, hard liquor, spicy foods, and bizarre sights.

At Le Loi Nuk, Rodriguez signed for a packet marked Confidential in the orderly room. It contained a new I.D. card from Major Rene Cazenave, and instructions to accompany Corporal Charles X. Finn that evening.

Rodriguez splashed through a shower, got into clean khaki, and sat down with his new buddies to play gin. They had a lot to talk about, policewise, but they said nothing.

The reason for silence was obvious: South Vietnamese looked exactly like North Vietnamese or like Viet Cong. In this wedge of Southeast Asia, natives of neighboring Laos and Cambodia were also look-alikes to Vietnamese.

A waiter, a bus boy, a pedal jockey on a tricycle taxi could be a

Viet Cong agent probing for new CIC arrivals to stake out for later mayhem or robbery. Those Americans who had gone before had learned the hard way.

Corporal Finn came in that evening as Rodriguez stood watching the horizon ferment of an orange and pink sunset beyond the rice marshes of the delta and the farther Gulf of Siam.

"Always nice to see somebody from El Paso," said Finn, winking the lie to Joe. Finn was six feet of stringy strength, with a craggy Irish face and carrot-red hair.

"Que nombre, chico?" said Rodriguez.

Finn smiled and palmed his I.D. card in line of sight. They left the lanai without a word.

"Just act like it's the Fort Ord PX," said Finn, as they strolled over to Tu Do Street and the area of the Hotel Caravelle. "So many troops have come and gone that no one knows if you've been here two days or two hitches."

Joe Rodrigcez took in the glow of neon and the surge of traffic and thought of Hollywood Boulevard on a preview night at Grauman's Chinese.

Finn said, "We're checking out the Café Joyeux de Foch. If any little peppermint girl fastens on to you, don't discourage her. It may be educational."

"I begin to see daylight," said Rodriguez. "I had been wondering how an enlisted man could insert

JOSE JUAN RODRIGUEZ

himself into a crowd of C-note spenders."

A fair-sized gathering of soldiers, sailors, and airmen was already creating a roar of camaraderie in the cafe. Chuck Finn and Joe Rodriguez pushed into the line at the bar, ordering gimlets from a blank-faced French-Chinese bartender.

They took the second gimlet with them, in order to stand beside potted palms and watch the almond-eyed fillies improve upon the basic wiggles of the Frug. A China doll of five foot six inches caught Joe's appreciative eye.

"She's a house dancing girl," Finn said. "She'll be over. She saw you piping her."

With this remark, Corporal Finn departed. Rodriguez laughed to

himself. He knew he was in good hands with this redhead—a real Saigon Commando, no doubt.

What an assignment, he thought. Like Sunset Strip on New Year's Eve, or Balboa Beach and the collegians during Easter Week.

FINN was right about the house girl. Rodriguez lost sight of her on the churning dance floor, only to have a gentle tug on his elbow announce her arrival at his side. He looked into a picture of composed and beautiful innocence. He liked the idea of her eyes being green.

"You sit me, Joe?" the girl said.

"The name's Fred. Fred Johnson," Joe lied. "Military information where I fight."

"I know, Fled. Not ask more." Her ability with the r's reflected an absence of English or American schools in her upbringing, Joe noted. He got the feeling that she was imitating some dominant woman along the way. Yet she made herself entirely clear in this shorthand of seaport language that she had evidently invented.

"We have drink," she said. She snapped her fingers and a teen-age boy waiter responded, read an order in the fan of her fingers, and dashed away.

"You take home Poc Lo Nang, Fled?"

"Poc Lo Nang. Sounds Vietnamese, not Chinese," Rodriguez said.

"Papa," she said, pronouncing it quick-like, PuhPAH, as the French do. "Papa he Flench Chinee. Mother she Vietnam. So me Chinamans Vietnam."

"With a touch of French dressing on the side," Rodriguez said.

The little waiter appeared with opened bottles, one of Gordon's Dry Gin and one of peppermint white-soda water.

Poc Lo Nang's green eyes lit up. The stuff was evidently the staff of life to her in this Paris of the East. She sloshed half gin and half peppermint water into a central glass, performing the mix simultaneously, and passed the glass to Joe. She made up a second concoction of equal size, clinked his glass, and drank down half of it at a gulp. Rodriguez thought: *wow!*

Then she said, "We take one botter, two botter, one grass, two grass. We go-go."

It was all right with Rodriguez. He was enjoying himself more than he cared to admit. So this was the fighting front in the war against Communism. Well, let's get in there, kiddo, and fight.

They took the bottles and glasses out the back way, to a tricycle taxi that waited as if by appointment. Rodriguez assisted Poc in the fresh-air passenger seat. Two blocks later, in the half-light of a tree-draped street, military police came in to the picture with a command of "Halt."

Rodriguez turned his back on the girl and revealed his special I.D.

card to the armed soldier, saying, "An errand of mercy, pal. She lives in Cholon."

"Turn right at the next intersection," said M. P. Armband. "Other roads off limits tonight."

Rodriguez saluted on general principles. The pedal jockey went into low gear.

"You big shot, Sergeant Fled," said Poc Lo Nang. "Here, botter, grass, we bottom up."

Which they did, in fact, not once, but twice in the dark and gamey atmosphere of the crowded Chinese city within Saigon.

He tried to remember landmarks in the spooky alleys, but lost track quickly. He was relieved to have the vehicle stop in front of a tin-roofed shed and end the journey.

"Foh hun'red piaster," the pedicar man said.

"Thief," shouted Poc. "Scam." She tossed a hundred piaster note of her own on the ground and walked away.

Poc now hastily composed her face into the expression of a gentle servant girl, held the half-empty "botters" in the folds of her silk sheath-pantaloons combo. She entered in the role of a modest daughter introducing an official caller to honored family.

The door swung wide. The chatter lessened. Rodriguez walked in upon an unexpected sight. A Chinese elder, dressed in the red and black silk coat and stove-pipe pants of a gentleman, and three Americans in uniform, stared at him.

"Papa," Poc Lo Nang said, "Sergeant Fled he tak home me."

Rodriguez smiled and stepped up, shook hands, then studied the others. One was a middle-aged major, with Air Force lapel insignia but non-rated for flying. One was a young Air Force lieutenant with pilot's wings. The third was a thirtyish Army nurse with first lieutenant's silver bars.

"At ease, Fled," the major said. "I Jack," he mocked with twinkling eyes. "This Rosalie, this Ed. Now that we know each other intimately, have a drink, buddy, and relax. There's no war going on in Cholon."

"Thanks," said Rodriguez. "First time I was ever in this here China quarter." He put on the dumb mountain boy act the least bit, as a precaution. If they thought him something of a simpleton, they might accept him more readily, he figured. That could mean absence of prying questions.

"You must have been the heavy winner," said Lieutenant Ed. Rodriguez pegged him for a fly-boy veteran, despite his mid-twenty's age. He had a confident look in oysterish blue eyes. The hair-cut framing a walnut-colored face was a close bush style, not a crew job. The new air force.

Rodriguez did not reply, not understanding the winner bit.

"You don't have to be cozy with

us," said the nurse, Rosalie. "It's a good cause, though strictly against regulations, chasing up lettuce for Ling Mao to exchange. It all gets through to the underground helping our prisoners in North Vietnam."

The puzzle began to click together for Rodriguez. These people were perhaps previous recruits by Poc Lo Nang or others, to help her father Ling Mao in some yet unexplained scheme. What a chance these officers were taking, monkeying around in an illegal and off-the-record caper, Rodriguez considered. It was the kind of amoral thing that people did casually, once they lost connection with the lawful way of life back state-side.

"I wasn't sure what was a'goin' on," said Rodriguez. The goofus approach seemed to be satisfying them, so he decided to stick to it.

"I give high rate, today top dollah," the benign Ling Mao now said to him. "You have gold bill?"

Rodriguez was surprised at his better English, after Poc's display of language. A high-class, educated man, he thought. One also with the shrewdness to run a poor man's black market. To do so was no damning thing in the Orient and a reasonable profit to the money changer who set up his own "bank" was not begrudged by customers.

"Not yet, Mr. Ling Mao," Rodriguez said. "I left my ol' buddy to play my winnings."

"His buddy Finn," Poc Lo Nang said. "Finn big shot. Fled he awso big shot. Now we go-go back. Dance. Fun. Whee-poopee."

"We got hooked the same way," said Major Jack, with a good-natured laugh. "Welcome to the club, Fred. Come back with the green stuff for Papa. You G.I.'s manage to get together more dough than we do, anyway."

The nurse Rosalie, a plump blonde with a command flavor to her, came up to Rodriguez, as he and Poc moved to the door. She said simply, "Good luck, Fred." He was astonished at the quiet, almost sisterly tone. *Why had she said anything?* he wondered.

The young detective considered, while enroute out of murky Cholon, that his first contact had at least been enlightening. He had bumped into a cul de sac of friendly people, perhaps typical of a war zone, where dependence on one another brought the officers and EM's closer together, and where for foreign nationals Americans customarily wore their hearts on their sleeves.

At Cafe Joyeux de Roch, Corporal Finn at first glance appeared to Rodriguez to be sloppy drunk. Finn was sitting at a table with three dancing girls and an oddly uniformed man. Closer study brought out that the uniformed man was a civilian, wearing the shoulder patch and captain's sleeve stripes of the Indo Airways, a small airline operating short haul to many cities of Southeast Asia.

Closer examination also convinced him that Finn was faking his drunk act.

Rodriguez and the fluttery Poc Lo Nang moved in to the table and sat down with no attempt at introductions.

Joe was used to this by now. Soldiers did not mind being unknowns to each other.

Poc said, "Where big game tonight, Finn?"

"Don't bother him," the civilian said. "The man's had it. Best get him back to barracks."

Rodriguez noted an Oxonian ring to the man's voice. It was a kind of upstaging voice but still friendly.

"Back room Claire de Lune," Finn said huskily. He took out his wallet and flung it at Rodriguez. "Take it, Pal. Play for me. Clive Robertson here is right. I better scram before I catch it."

The act was a direction and an order, Rodriguez decided. He looked on as Clive Robertson walked out, supporting the reeling Finn.

"Come, Fled," said Poc, taking him by the hand.

They departed on foot to the drumming racket of Club Claire de Lune down the street.

Unnoticed, they entered a curtained-off back room. This was because all eyes of the crowd were taking in a center scene which looked like it had been transplanted from a casino in Las Vegas: a professional crap table with bet markings on green felt.

The house man was a tall and lean Chinese with cold spring-steel tension in his gaunt face. His assistant appeared to be a smaller brother. Rodriguez had never before seen Chinamen like these. A different breed, the squat and affable Cantonese, populated the Chinatowns of San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York.

A mustached man owned the dice on the up-coming pass. A loose pile of several thousand dollars—mostly in U.S. fifties and hundreds, but including a sprinkling of Indian rupee notes, Australian dollars, and English pounds—was being faded by the house man with U.S. hundred-dollar bills.

Side bets showered down like falling leaves. No one uttered a word, since only money talked.

The fortyish passer flung the cubes at the green pad. Up came Snake Eyes. Cries of release burst out from the ring of spectators. They seemed to Rodriguez to sympathize with the loser. Several decorative dancing girls at once clung to him, extending sympathy of a sort.

"Too bahd," said Poc Lo Nang. "Eddie never win biggerer pot."

"You know him, Poc? Eddie who?"

"Eddie Duray. Fliend Robertson. Come, we sorry him."

Rodriguez did not go with her at once. He edged into the ring of side

bet players at the table and took out a ten dollar bill, placing it on Come. He hunched over the table, inspecting the crisp currency before him.

He concentrated his gaze to find a legible signature on the bills. This was no place for a man who could not read a telephone book without glasses. He easily picked up the tell-tale compactness of the name Humphrey.

In the shuffling of the house man's assistant, as he sorted and stacked denominations of money, Rodriguez spotted seven crisp C-notes with the 1953-1957 signature.

There was no way to know who had supplied it: the house, the previous shooters, the side-bet makers. And any of them could have got it originally in another game. But at least here was a plenty of the "hot money" and associated directly with the big wheels of the city.

Rodriguez waited for the pass, grimaced when the shooter draped box cars on the green, and headed over to Poc Lo Nang.

A bevy of silk-sheathed Vietnamese girls talked all at once. Perhaps it was Eddie Duray's romantic moustache, the dark maroon tan of face, or the deliberately unkempt black hair that got them.

"Tough going," Rodriguez said simply to Duray.

"Saigon is just not my town," said Duray. He did not appear hurting from the sudden extraction of several grand.

For the next half hour, Rodriguez casually cased the crowd, getting the big operators registered in his mind for features and branch of service.

Many were well-dressed civilians: American, French, Chinese, British. He saw Duray depart alone. The crowd expanded. Then he at last saw his first familiar faces in Saigon: the nurse and the lieutenant whom he had just recently met in Cholon as Rosalie and Ed. He watched them ease into the player ring.

Just about this time, the young detective found himself wilting physically. He knew it was not the bad air and the clatter of the back room, for he had served apprenticeship in many a Hollywood trap and mastered the trick of staying alert all night. Then it came to him that the last time he had slept soundly in a week was back home in Chavez Ravine.

After saying good night to Poc Lo Nang, he started back to his quarters, hearing the distant growl of jet engines from Tan Son Nhuit airport, the wild screech of air strikes getting airborne, and the measured poom and crump of far-stationed artillery.

Fantastic, Rodriguez thought. Like living in the hollow of Toluca Lake and listening to sounds of war from over the Cahuenga Pass.

An hour before dawn he bolted

upright in his cot and peered through the draped mosquito netting. The reason was a creak of noise at the lanai door. Then he saw Major Rene Cazenave slide into the room. One by one, the major cautiously woke up Rodriguez's four roommates.

"Corporal Finn of our outfit has just been found dead near the Xa Loi Pagoda," Cazenave said. "Poor guy, they broke his neck. A karate hack severed the spine. We are keeping this off the record, of course, to give us time to flush out suspects. The killer must have been sent by the hot money boys, for that's all that Chuck Finn has been assigned to for a month.

"They probably figured that Finn was up to something, the way he was rapidly becoming No. One G.I. gambler in Saigon. Well, we take our chances, just like the soldiers out in the boondocks. I'm sorry as hell it happened. Rodriguez. You were with him. Give us a rundown."

Briefly Rodriguez related his movements of the night, naming all people whom he had met.

"The nurse is Lieutenant Rosalie Anspacher, attached to the critical wounds ward at Saigon military hospital," Cazenave said. "A dedicated do-gooder. Loves the Vietnamese."

He then instructed Private Bill Blewitt, a former plain-clothesman of Chicago, to get a statement from her. Rosalie knew Finn, he said.

Had she seen him anywhere about town, and with whom, after curfew?

Sergeant Duane Nelligan, formerly of Boston PD, was assigned to talk to "Ed," who was Lieutenant Ed Hanley, at nearby Bien Hoa air defense strip. Finn and Hanley were fellow gamblers and ran into each other at many spots, on and off limits.

As for Jack, Cazenave explained that Major John Goodrich was CIC's officer in USOM, known only to the top brass.

"I'm surprised he got in the act. This is definitely not his beat. Maybe he's giving Rosalie the rush."

Rodriguez saw a certain disappointment come into the major's face. Jurisdiction—they had it here, just like in the bureaus and divisions back home.

Cazenave continued, saying, "I'll look into Clive Robertson and Lover Boy Eddie Duray myself, at Indo Airways. Those characters are hangovers from the French era in Vietnam. Both with clearance, or Indo wouldn't employ them. Robertson and Duray flew troop carrier planes and later were forced to fight as infantry alongside the French Foreign Legion at the Dien Bien Phu surrender."

"That's the way I had Robertson pegged," said Rodriguez. "The gentleman adventurer type. Bitten by an old Ronald Colman film."

"And very highly paid," added Cazenave. "We have no reason to suspect either, but they do get around."

Cazenave shrugged. "That little broad Poc Lo Nang, she likes you. More so than others we've sicked on to her in the past. Okay. Maneuver her into going with you to the Buddhist temple, quick-like. As you approach the concourse—the place where visitors take off their shoes so they can enter tha pagoda —there's a red-painted bench seat on the right. You can't miss it.

"Chuck Finn was found in the bushes right behind that bench. Search that area carefully. Give it a real treatment, Rodriguez. Time is short. Sundown today we'll have to announce the death of Chuck Finn."

Rodriguez had taken a fancy to the craggy redhead Finn. He felt like hell to think of him as gone.

RODRIGUEZ dressed up and hailed a pedi-car for the smelly ride to Cholon. In his wallet was a fifty-dollar bill—crisp, new, a strong-boy fugitive from the Eisenhower administration. The bill had been given to him by Major Cazenave, with instructions to use it as a kind of bait with the girl's father.

He was to get his reactions, if any, upon presenting it. He was pleased that Ling Mao had been added to the suspect list.

Cazenave had explained a facet of the money exchange racket. Blackmarket exchanges could and did outbid the legal exchanges at banks, forcing inflation. Simultaneously, the soldier's U.S. military scrip, used at official stores and commissaries, reduced the need for patronizing money exchanges in order to get piasters.

Some there are who say that the Chinese sleep with their eyes open. This was easy for Rodriguez to believe when he knocked at the hut in Cholon, heard a sing-song call of "Come in," and looked at the venerable Ling Mao, seated in exactly the same position he had occupied in the ratty room last night.

"Poc Lo Nang sleep," Ling Mao said.

"I came to see you," said Rodriguez. "Ling Mao, I win big. I brought you a gold bill." He took the embellished portrait of Ulysses S. Grant from his wallet. "I want to shop city side and send some presents home. Will you change to piasters?"

Ling Mao produced a fruit basket of South Vietnamese piasters from a cupboard. "Today highest exchange rate," he said.

Rodriguez could only consider that here was a whale of a lot of piasters, in various shades of paper and sizes of alloy coins, for one fifty-dollar Treasury guarantee of the

USA. He could take Ling's word for it that he was getting the equivalent of more than $50 worth of buying power in Saigon markets.

"I wake Poc Lo Nang," Ling Mao said. "She good shopper. Save you money."

Rodriguez wondered immediately if the signature on the currency had influenced the old boy to bring his daughter into the act. The possibility existed, he decided. But there had been absolutely no reaction when he took the bill, thumbed its texture, and pocketed it swiftly.

Poc Lo Nang appeared after a short interval and with no apparent resentment at being shaken awake by her father. She now had on a shocking-pink silk sheath, slit high over pantaloons—the uniform of Vietnamese B-girls. She looked fresh and perky.

How do they do it? thought Rodriguez.

Weaving between the morning hustlers enroute to rice paddies and to merchandise stalls, Rodriguez and Poc came upon an uproar in an alley. A man, who was slumped in a tricycle taxi, yelled at the hovels and in turn dodged clumps of mud and refuse from antagonists.

The man was Clive Robertson—stoned, and calling out in words unintelligible to Rodriguez, to the spectators in windows and doorways.

"Go-go quick-quick," Poc addressed the pedal jockey. To Rodriguez she said, "Crive drink one more much. I not want him see Poc cause stink."

"He brings your father gold bills, too?"

"Sometime. This time he maybe broke bust. Papa give him coffee-cakes piasters."

A loan agency as well as a money black market, Rodriguez thought. He said to Poc, "Is that the way your father makes his living—as a loan agency?"

"My papa work honest iron foundry," she said haughtily. "My papa big shot."

The pedal jockey groaned and pitied himself out loud. The awful odor of Cholon lessened. Soon Poc and Rodriguez arrived at the grand concourse entrance to Xa Loi Pagoda, showplace of the Buddhist faith in Vietnam.

Rodriguez noted the red bench at the right. It was occupied by an American woman in uniform: Lieutenant Rosalie Anspacher. Time out before changing into whites and going on duty, he wondered?

"We seem to meet again—for the third time, soldier," she said. "I saw you last night at the Claire de Lune with your girl friend."

The nurse was probably a veteran of the early war years, Rodriguez judged. The search of the bench area was impossible to make for the moment, he decided.

A thrill of pleasure surged through Rodriguez the moment he walked into the ultra luxurious Xa

Loi pagoda. It was indeed a brand new world to him. In a broad nave, several dozen young Buddhist athletes were following the motions of an iron-lipped instructor of Judo. They were candidates for belts of excellence and had supposedly dedicated their lives to Gautama and his teachings, according to Poc.

He wondered if they were also soldiers, dedicated to the preservation of South Vietnam. Or of North Vietnam. Or some among them dedicated to the elimination of American soldiers by karate chops.

On the tile mosaic before the altar, with its impressive statue of Buddha in a brick-red robe hundreds of red candles in golden candlestick holders formed an arc of light. Yellow and carmine were the colors in his area of view seats, chairs and rich carpeting.

Rodriguez looked closely at a casual chair and found that it was inlaid with rubies, emeralds, and decorated with thick jade placques. The sight was prime evidence of the economic strength of the influential Buddhists.

Rodriguez studied the calm expression of Buddha on the altar. Gautama's eyes were closed to slits. He was thinking hard thoughts he judged.

The nurse was gone when Rodriguez came back to the bench. He stepped into his field shoes. In the toe of the left shoe he felt a soft obstruction. He pulled it out gingerly, unseen by Poc. He was imagining everything dangerous, from a plastic bomb to a squashy jungle spider.

The obstruction was a piece of rice paper with a message in pencil, signed R.A. The message read, "Your boss says fill you in on this. Robertson apparently overpowered by VC while taking Finn to barracks through industrial district. Finn probably kidnaped, then removed to pagoda, beaten. Robertson escaped."

Rodriguez smiled tautly, but only for the effect on Poc, who hastened to tie his shoe laces up.

He decided now that Rosalie was a member of Cazenave's In crowd, despite the billing given her as a do-gooder. He could imagine Rosalie at work in her hospital ward, slipping a goof ball or two of sodium amytal, truth serum, to someone whom the CIC wanted to check up on. Why not? She was a soldier under oath of allegiance like himself.

Major Cazenave had not been entirely open about the case. But Rodriguez realized that Cazenave was not at fault. This was just the military way.

Rodriguez sat Poc Lo Nang down on the bench and proceeded to examine the area. Signs of struggle were still present—snapped twigs and bruised leaves. The yellow pollen of bright red hibiscus blooms had been knocked from stamens and powdered a patch of ground.

Then a tiny shaft of light caught

his eye from the moist ground itself. He brushed aside dirt.

A luminous star sapphire the color of cornflower blue came to view, with its ring band, from the depressed hiding place.

He stooped to examine it. As he did so, a stinging blow on the shoulder knocked him to the side and down.

His next conscious moment came in looking up into Poc Lo Nang's frightened face. Then the pains, burning in his left shoulder, took over and he clenched his teeth. Poc whimpered in sympathy.

"What happened?" he said.

"Man bang you run," she said and held her small hand rigid as in a chop.

He pulled himself up, saw no one running, no one even curious about his fall. He searched now for the stone of cornflower blue. It was gone.

Whether hit by a VC who had tailed him, or by some passerby who saw the glint of the stone too, Rodriguez could not be certain. Whoever it was packed the power of a steel rod. He felt himself plain lucky to have missed the full force of the karate chop. Chuck Finn had not.

He hailed a pedi-car, and with Poc Lo Nang, went at once to Headquarters, where Major Cazenave had his office concealed among the army engineers. Poc waited beyond the barbed wire and the line of sentries with their Thompson riot guns at the ready.

"The ring you saw was Chuck Finn's," said the major sadly. "He was very proud of it. A certified stone. Seven hundred rupees in the Calcutta jewel market. He usually wore it when gambling, for luck."

Rodriguez said, "Maybe that's the message he intended to give us, when he jammed it into the ground —that his attackers were among the players in the night's big-time game."

"Could be," said Cazenave.

The major now pulled down a wall drape, showing a blackboard with scrawled names and a crude map. Written down were all the names of people whom Major Cazenave had so far mentioned to Rodriguez, plus more than ten new names.

"This broad is officially your department now, Joe," said Cazenave. He pointed to the name of Poc Lo Nang. "She's what they used to call a Typhoid Mary. Wherever she goes, trouble seems to go, too. Maybe she's got a beach-head with rich civilians and diplomats, as well as with our soldiers. On account of Chuck Finn, our pitch will be to do a twenty-four-hour job on her.

"Now, my friend, you need a few hours sleep. So take Poc to the hospital and turn her over to Rosalie Anspacher. Rosalie will lose her conveniently in the women's ward and send her back in the morning with a bath, which she probably needs. Okay, Joe, *hasta luego*."

Rodriguez did this exact thing, using a simple ruse: the magnet of publicity. He told her that a TV newscaster was about to do a special report at the hospital and wanted some pretty local girls to decorate the wards. The lie was irresistible to her feminine instincts.

When Rosalie took over, Rodriguez rushed back to Le Loi Nuk to take up the sleeping bit at long last. He hit the sack in broad daylight and went out like a light.

He woke in the lanai at about 2000 hours, in fear of having botched the whole job. Skies were black. Neon glared upward from the streets. Night-blooming jasmine wafted its overpowering aroma. And where was he? Sitting on a cot in his underwear.

He hopped to it and soon was pushing through the crowd at Cafe Joyeux de Foch to keep his appointment with Poc Lo Nang.

The only trouble was, she was not there. Nor did she show up in the next hour. If only he could have a steaming plate of ham and eggs, Rodriguez thought. This peppermint and gin, to wash down cinnamon cookies, was a new and terrifying way of life. The brainless little tramp, he thought—she probably left the hospital, forgot about him, and went to another Frug cafe with her latest candidate for introduction to Papa.

This speculation was soon discredited. Sergeant Duane Nelligan and Private Bill Blewitt of Detachment XN-1 unexpectedly sat down at the table and enlightened him.

"The pink dove has flown the coop, heading north," the sergeant said. "The Frisco Kid says come with us."

Rodriguez blushed with shame, interpreting the paraphrase. So she had objected to the hospital, escaped, and had left the city, probably going to Bien Hoa to hook new suckers. The young detective accepted all blame. He should have managed somehow to keep her in sight.

Outside the Café Joyeux de Foch, a jeep and a driver waited. The three soldiers jumped in and the jeep roared off down Cong Ly to Cach Mang Street and the Tan Son Nhuit airport.

On the field, their credentials got them swiftly to an apron on which a shining new two-place F-111 was ready, with its jet engines raising a great veil of heat beneath the rudder.

"You're going to Da Nang," said the CIC sergeant, Duane Nelligan. "Poc Lo Nang is aboard an Indo Airways flight to Hong Kong. The plane is an old World War Two C-forty-seven, remodelled for passengers. Since it's slow, Major Cazenave has arranged for you to catch up. The C-forty-seven is being held at Da Nung airfield on the excuse of a Condition Red alert. Marine Intelligence will take you over at Da Nang. Good luck, Joe. I envy you."

The left canopy, looking forward, was open on the F-111, and the pilot in the right canopy was helmetted and plugged in. Joe Rodriguez climbed up and in, ready for his first ride in any new tactical fighter.

The pilot swung an oxygen-communications helmet over his head, sealed the canopy, and called, "Code Santa Anita, ready for take-off."

A taxi dash, a brutal lunge forward—and Uncle Sam's beautiful titanium bird was off.

IN THE silence of March 2 flight, Rodriguez had time to review his position in the manhunt. Cazenave had not said it in so many words, but it was now evident that he was working around the clock with all available personnel, trying to put hands on the would-be saboteurs of Saigon's economic structure. Why else could they spare an F-111 to tail a peppermint girl?

At famous Da Nang, a marine sergeant came into the picture. He turned over civilian clothes to Rodriguez, along with a package of credit cards and credentials made out to a "Bernard de Viveiros, resident of Macao."

"You've made a *Portugues* out of me," said Rodriguez. "That's pretty close, pal. Thanks."

Rodriguez reached to the dirt floor of the shack and fingered a swatch dark wet dust to his upper lip. A trace of unshaven mustache, he decided, would be in key for a civilian traveler in war-torn Southeast Asia.

In the airplane, which he boarded without incident by merely edging into the group of fifteen to twenty people who waited in a hangar, Rodriguez saw a mixed bag of people; including Poc Le Nang. In holiday mood particularly were the G.I.'s, smartened up in their Class A uniforms.

These were the green-bereted Special Forces, famous number infantry divisions of Army and U.S. Marines—top-quality soldiers all, many of whom had signed up to stay another stretch in Vietnam. They could have gone home, but Uncle Sugar Able had a rival, the mysterious Orient.

Clive Robertson, Indo pilot, now appeared briefly at the cockpit door, looking very much like a Limey pilot in an adventure movie, Rodriguez thought.

He said, "Sorry for the delay. A reminder that war is still hell, eh? We now have clearance—and I might add, protection—for the balance of our flight over the coastal area to Hong Kong. Cheerio."

Whoever owned Indo Airways had a good personnel manager. Robertson was born to his many-dutied job: pilot, actor, public relationist.

Poc, Rodriguez now observed, was being the life of the party with soldiers in her orbit up front in the more decorative first class area of

seats. The little traitor, he thought wryly. Then he recalled that it was this exact quality of irresponsibility which had caused Cazenave to mark her out for special surveillance.

Rodriguez lolled back, attempting to nod into sleep for the last leg of the flight. He was doing fine, almost asleep, when his eyes caught the shimmer of a bald head in one of the more ornate front seats. The man seemed to be a Chinese elder. He was. As a matter of fact, he was Ling Mao, the altruistic foundryman.

It wasn't as impossible as it looked. Hong Kong to Taiwan should not be too much of a travel problem for Ling Mao. The English port of call was a clearing house for planes.

Ling Mao evidently had more status than his shabby quarters in Cholon indicated.

Rodriguez was thus musing when a drop in the sound decibel startled him. Others stiffened in their seats, too.

Clive Robertson quickly appeared at the cockpit door. His face was calm.

He said, "Ladies and gentlemen, we have encountered a power loss in our No. Two engine. There is no danger. We will certainly reach Hong Kong without incident. My co-pilot is adjusting to the power output now."

Thirty-five minutes later the C-47 circled the cone of silence and descended along a wide path of lights into Hong Kong's international airport.

Among the first off the craft, Joe Rodriguez bee-lined to a group of security guards. They were bearded Sikhs, giants of men in sky blue turbans and immaculate khaki shorts. They informed him that their commander was the little Englishman in the Madras sports jacket, a man who appeared like any other tourist near the plane. To this man, Rodriguez opened his wallet, to show the special I.D. card from Major Cazenave and his shield of LAPD.

"General surveillance," said Rodriguez. "I may be in and out of the field a bit."

"Rahto, chum," the security commander replied. He handed Joe a personal calling card, on which was engraved "George Arthur Pinter, Squadron Leader, Royal Air Force, M.B.E."

"Use this with my people," he said. "They can be bloody rude otherwise."

Rodriguez watched the passengers walk into the customs clearance area. Poc Lo Nang, in her shrieking pink sheath, was in tow of three American soldiers. Ling Mao hung back, apparently waiting for Clive Robertson to finish his talk with a maintenance man in a jumper.

"It's a take-down job," Rodriguez heard the mechanic say to Robertson.

"Then we'll flight-test her this evening," said Robertson.

Good, Rodriguez thought. That fact alone should keep all of his suspects pinned down in Hong Kong and therefore easier to monitor. Besides, the dramatic skyline of mighty hills and tall buildings across the great bay in the morning light beckoned to Rodriguez to take time out and enjoy himself in sightseeing, perhaps ordering up a twenty-four-hour suit, and tasting a bit of the Oriental cuisine at this magnificent crossroads of the world.

As it soon worked out, he got that chance. Poc and her father registered in to the Cornwallis Hotel, a stylish place in the mixed-nationals part of town. Robertson did not. The debonair Britisher went across the street to the Albert Club.

Joe Rodriguez, as tourist Bernard de Viveiros, registered in to the Cornwallis, but camped exclusively in the lobby.

Noon came and so did Ling Mao and his daughter. They lunched in the Cornwallis, then walked in the crowded street to the South China Trust Bank, a quarter mile away. Rodriguez entered the bank behind them and watched Ling Mao place a thick envelope on the desk of a trust officer. The young detective noted the bank officer's name plate: GERALD FARQUHAR.

Before checking with Farquhar, however, Rodriguez resolved now to make a positive move—to confront Ling Mao, though it meant disclosing his presence to Poc. If the man were honest, Joe reasoned, he had no valid reason to withhold information from a military detective. Such information would also more or less explain the position of Poc, he considered, and thus bring an end to the so far fruitless chase.

Rodriguez therefore retraced his steps, in the path taken by Ling Mao and Poc, back to the Cornwallis. En route he stopped to look at the shop windows.

At the hotel he went up to the fifth floor, and to Suite 520, which number "Senhor de Viveiros" got from the hotel clerk. As he came to the door he heard a commotion beyond it, not at all like room cleaning. It was as if a struggle were taking place.

He pulled at the door, found it open, and looked in. Two Chinese in bellboy jackets wrestled fiercely with Ling Mao, attempting to tie his hands with rope. The old man was no match for them. His bulky body was being pushed steadily around the floor.

Ling Mao yelled, evidently in shock and helpless. Poc Lo Nang stood frozen with fright at a bedroom door.

Joe Rodriguez rushed in, dove for the legs of the assailants, and clutched hard in the pincers of a football tackle. One bellboy wavered. Ling Mao's grasp tumbled him over and down to the floor.

Rodriguez scrambled to get up,

eager to trade punches with the two wirey bellboys.

He never got the chance. His eyes saw white pingpong lights. He felt the crunch and sting of a blow on the back of his head. It was the same sharp chop effect that he had received at Xa Loi Pagoda grounds. Only this one was accurate. Rodriguez stretched out limp on the floor.

He woke up looking into the worried face of Poc Lo Nang.

"Karate punch you," she said. "You save my Papa, Fled." She pointed to the bedroom, where the old man was stretched on a chaise lounge.

"Where are they?" he said.

"Fast go-go. Flaid you wake up. Why you here Hong Kong, Fled? You forrow me?"

"I follow your father," said Rodriguez. He pulled himself up, wincing from the tender pear under the skin of his scalp by the left ear. He went to Ling Mao and said, "Who were they, Ling?"

"Saigon VC traitors," said Ling Mao. "They come to steal prisoner money. I have put it in bank to credit Taiwan bank. So get back North Vietnam to prisoners. They say I lie. They want tie me up, take me."

Depending on the testimony of South China Trust Bank's Gerald Farquhar, Rodriguez swiftly decided Ling Mao had either cleared himself or indicted himself. He decided to forego finding out which for the moment, in favor of getting to a doctor and having his painful head dressed.

"Do not leave this room," he instructed Poc Lo Nang. "I am coming back and talk to you."

He did not say about what, but he had in mind a good old-fashioned grilling about her friends Robertson, Duray, and any others whom she had lured into her father's blackmarket money exchange operation.

When, several hours later, he returned from a wearying search for medical care, he looked across the lobby of the Cornwallis and his heart raced in alarm. Poc was leaving the hotel. She was dressed in a royal blue sheath, hair garlands of white camellias, and a loose Victorian cloak of faded rose. Her father was not with her. She went to the cab line and stepped into a Hillman.

Rodriguez forgot his throbbing head, stepped into the next cab up and instructed the driver to follow her.

Then he was really jolted. Poc Lo Nang did not head for the expected night club, bar, or Oriental Roseland. She went back to the airport. Rodriguez moved in, up to the point of seeing her on the apron of a maintenance hangar—and greeted by Eddie Duray.

She mounted the portable ramp stairway with Eddie Duray into the C-47.

Duray's unexpected presence and her surprising move was a real

mystery to Rodriguez. He could not imagine one helpful thing that this dizzy young woman could do for Duray in connection with a maintenance problem. Nonetheless, she and Duray remained inside the fuselage, up to an hour, when navigation lights suddenly flashed on the wing tips and rudder of the C-47.

The lights were a signal of warning. Duray and Poc would be in the pilot's cabin in order to switch on the lights. He hurried up the ramp stairway unnoticed, into the fuselage, and pulled packed parachutes over himself in the aft equipment locker. If caught, he was prepared to lie boldly to Duray that he had been stowed away ever since Da Nang. Meanwhile, Poc could not get out of the airplane without passing by him several feet away at the cargo hatch entry.

Rodriguez had time in the next half hour to try to decipher Poc's unusual actions. Perhaps Duray had plotted with her, back in Saigon, to be his Hong Kong girl friend. Perhaps Duray had chosen this particular method in order to shake off various G.I.'s on leave, as well as the attractive Robertson.

The wheeze and cough of an engine starting, now sounded. No. 1 engine. Rodriguez could tell this from the direction of heaviest vibration. Then No. 2 engine barked on in the same way. Someone unknown jumped aboard and pulled the hatchway closed. He judged this person to be a mechanic, flight engineer, or radioman. After a short period of warm-up, the C-47 crept ahead, and gathered taxing speed.

Rodriguez realized that for the first time he would take a ride in an airplane being flight-tested, like it or not. Poc had not left the pilot's cabin. He had no choice but to stick with her. There was ever the chance that Duray might land at nearby Macao, the Portuguese enclave, and dump her off.

At first the test-flight aimed for altitude. The bank of the wings indicated a steady circling in tortured climbing. Then Joe Rodriguez wondered how far away from Hong Kong the test would be conducted, for the craft levelled out and the engines sang smoothly with full power on. At length, he curiously could stand it no longer. He wanted to know just how far out over water he was.

To solve the mystery, and also try to relieve the steady pain-pulse of his tender head, Rodriguez raised himself out of the hide-out.

Night had closed in completely, he saw. The only light was a dull glow of instruments from the pilot's compartment and the light of a weak bulb over the radioman's nook, in which a crewman with earphones sat hunched over the chart table.

Looking out a window on the port side of the fuselage, he saw no star configurations that were familiar.

He went to the starboard side. What he saw shocked him. There was the spread of the Big Dipper, with its cannister stars pointing to Polaris, fairly low to the horizon.

Seeing Polaris, that is, the North Star, out of this window could mean one thing only—the airplane was speeding west, right into the heart of Red China, directly towards the mountainous province of Yunnan.

The man Duray was either crazy, incompetent, or arrogantly daring, Rodriguez decided. In a test-flight, at that. If the engine failed to perform again, they all faced disaster. But Duray's background indicated that he might do damn fool things like this. A soldier of fortune makes his own rules.

In the next hour, the airplane's direction did not change. Duray was locked on a set course. It could only be hoped that he had enough fuel to do a one hundred eighty-degree turn and make it back.

Rodriguez slumped down next to parachutes, ready to cover himself should the radioman come aft. This did not happen. He dozed off in spite of his best efforts to stay awake. He did not know for how long. He did know that he awoke with fear flooding through him, for the C-47 now was flying on reduced power and losing altitude steadily.

Sharp pains shot into the detective's ears at the steady drop in altitude. Then the air horn, warning of critical altitude, squawked. The C-47 sailed in and touched down, bumped ferociously, then smoothed out in a drag of brakes.

An arc of a small searchlight swept the darkness. Rodriguez climbed in to hide again beneath the stack of parachutes.

All he could hope was that the trusty old C-47 had reached the Shan States in the northern highlands of the Thailand-Laos-Burma juncture.

THE HATCH door clanged open. Poc's shrill voice sounded from forward. Feet pounded on the fuselage decking.

Duray's voice called out something unintelligible, but jovial sounding. Joe Rodriguez listened, dumbfounded that the pilot was in no state of agitation over his landing.

"Stack 'em up in the aisle," Duray now said, evidently to his helper. "I'm taking the girl with me to Transportation. I'll start 'em refueling."

"Okay, chief," came the answer.

A bit later, Rodriguez heard only rasping noises up front in the fuselage. He peered out. The radioman was working at something, hovering over the seats, as if he were adjusting them or cleaning them. A lucky break, he judged, to have Mr. Radioman engaged in aerial housekeeping. It furnished time for a man in the dark to get outside and try to find out where the airplane had landed.

Rodriguez crept out the cargo

hatch door, unobserved, and stepped down the hooked ladder. A blast of freezing wind went through his light civilian suit. Several roustabouts in fur caps and quilted coats were pushing a dolly of cargo some yards away. A mechanic was unscrewing the gas tank cap on the skin, preparatory to inserting the fuel hose and filling her up.

No one of any obvious authority was in sight on the dark hard-stand. The principal airport buildings loomed darkly in the distance, a quarter mile away. No city lights glared on the horizon. He decided that anyone of commonsense would be inside those buildings, out of the penetrating chill.

He ventured some twenty yards in the gloom before coming upon a welcome sight—an unlighted sign.

Chinese brush characters, and English and French words, could be made out. The English line read: KUNMING PEOPLE'S AIRPORT.

Rodriguez gasped in cruel surprise, for Kunming was in the heart of Red China.

Kunming was about six hundred air miles from the China coast, Rodriguez estimated. Kunming was the place mentioned by all the old war veterans as the headquarters of General Claire Chennault and the 14th Air Force. This very field, he speculated, had to be the former scene of the American air fight against the Japnese who controlled the coastal provinces during all of WWII.

And dwelling on the significance of Red Kunming, Rodriguez shuddered. The chase had led him smack inside Commie land. Headlights now were pointing toward the airplane. Rodriguez faded into the darkness, out of the beam. In doing so, the young detective realized that he was taking a fearful chance. He was running the risk of not getting safely back into the C-47 if Duray came back to resume the flight.

A truck soon came into view and backed around to the C-47 loading hatch. It was a clear reminder of the old American days on this field: a big GMC six by six, undoubtedly one which came into China in 1945 over the Ledo-Burma Road.

Something big was up in connection with this truck, Rodriguez decided. He watched seven people come out of it. Eddie Duray, Poc Lo Nang, and a hard-looking young Chinese who wore horn-rimmed

glasses. Four other men were obvious strong boys. Strong enough to lift out an old-fashioned platform scales from the truck and place it on the ground.

The man with the glasses took his place by the truck's tail gate; an abacus and a clipboard were in his hands.

Duray entered the airplane with two of the muscle men. The other two waited below the hatch door.

Poc Lo Nang shivered in her cloak, standing to one side of the official-looking Chinese.

In some seconds the first object came out of the hatch. It was handed down to the waiting unloaders, who carried it to the weighing scale Here, the man with the glasses took a pencil-like object from his pocket and scraped the surface. When he had apparently satisfied himself about some detail he weighed the object, then flicked the abacus and checked the clipboard.

The object was strange in its shape. It appeared to Rodriguez to be a scrollery design of the ornamental type used in garden chairs. He strained to see, then judged that the ornaments could be jade, could be lacquered insets from the sides and backs of the passenger seats in the oddly decorated interior of the airplane.

Eight of these scrolleries came out, were checked, weighed, and went into the truck.

Then the checker did some figguring on the abacus and presented the clipboard to Poc Lo Nang. She scrawled something on the board, shivering in the cold.

Eddie Duray appeared at the hatch and seemed contented enough, smiling at Poc's discomfort.

This checker now went to the truck and dismissed his helpers, who moved away to a hut some twenty yards in the distance.

When the men were gone, the Chinese boss climbed the little passenger ladder to the hatch door, where Duray now waited with a quart bottle of clear white liquid in his hands. Gin or Vodka, Rodriguez judged. Duray and friend were about to have a straight one for the crooked air road.

Meantime, Poc Lo Nang began her difficult and unassisted climb back into the airplane. As a smuggler of contraband *objects d'art,* she was apparently rated as second-class.

Rodriguez realized that here his opportunity to survive awaited, if only for fleeting seconds. All were inside the fuselage, warming themselves against the mountain cold of Kunming. He was unobserved. He thanked his lucky stars as he dashed through the lighted area and positioned himself behind the rudder.

Despite his throbbing head and the cutting wind, he felt grateful for this small advantage. Without it he could not make a try to sneak back into the airplane. And the penalty

for being left stranded in Kunming could be at the least a life-time on the water wheel in some forgotten mountain valley.

He approached his vital problem with the sure knowledge that one false step meant his life. Soon the Chinese Red official and the radioman stepped down the hooked ladder. As they did, Rodriguez checked and saw that Duray was in his seat and looking down from the pilot's left window. Joe then made the instant bet that Poc Lo Nang was sitting in the co-pilot's right-side seat.

The radioman walked to the truck with the official. They talked briefly and soon the radioman waved him off down the road. Now up close, Rodriguez noted that the radioman appeared to be a half-breed Chinese. He wore a shoulder holster in which was slung an Army Forty-Five.

Joe Rodriguez edged to a squat under the aelerons and rudder of the C-47. When he saw the radioman stoop to kick the braking chocks from under the two wheels, he climbed swiftly up the hooked ladder, into the fuselage, and scrambled under the stack of parachutes.

In a span of seconds, the ladder came in, the hatch door clanged shut, and the aisle echoed with the thump of the radioman's boots. Engines whined, sputtered, coughed, and caught. Duray sped the airplane out and up in a typical wartime let's-get-the-hell-out-of-here takeoff of warping wing tips and struggling engines.

Rodriguez relaxed, despite the bumpy air and the fierce twisting of fuselage and wings. The pell-mell rush told him that Eddie Duray did not want to stick around any longer in Red China either. It would be a fast trip back to the Indo Airways of neon-blazing Hong Kong.

Rodriguez now concentrated total thought on his exact moves at touchdown time to come. He prayed that he would stay at least half-awake until that time of glowing lights below and the night show of neon-blazing Hong Kong. ,

He had caught Eddie Duray in the act of smuggling, and established Poc as an accomplice. He was determined to arrest them for this alone—and hope that either one would sing and involve unknown superiors.

As before, Rodriguez came to sharp alertness with the queasy sensation of reduced speed and subsequent steady loss of altitude. When he heard the critical low-altitude horn squawk, he raised up out of the parachute stack, saw the radioman silhouetted in the companionway behind the pilot.

He also saw by the chutes a cardboard carton marked Vodka in Russian, English, French, and Chinese characters. He stepped carefully up the aisle to a position behind the radioman.

"Eleven hundred," the helper

called out the altimeter reading for the busy pilot. "Ten fifty . . . Ten Nine hundred . . ." In this way the pilot could zero in better and keep the waltzing airplane in its landing pattern.

At two hundred feet, Rodriguez thrust his arm around the radioman's neck, jerked him back with a knee in the spine, and simultaneously grabbed the Forty-Five out of his shoulder holster.

Poc swung around. She saw Joe Rodriguez, but gave no sign of her discovery. Duray flicked his head, annoyed at the commotion in back of him. He could do nothing whatsoever about it. He was too busy with the control adjustments of a successful touchdown.

Rodriguez said to his captured man, "Sit down at the chart table with your hands over your head."

To Duray, Rodriguez said, when the props revved in reverse and brakes took effect, "Come with me, Duray, or they'll carry you."

He snapped off the safety catch of the .45 and shoved it in Duray's chest. Then he backed out carefully down the aisle.

He said harshly to Poc Lo Nang, "Open the hatch and put down the ladder. Don't tell me you can't. You certainly must have done it before. You've done about everything there is to do."

He intended to lash out and kick her down if she tried any Judo trick. But she didn't.

When his feet reached hardstand, Rodriguez raised the pistol into the air and squeezed the trigger, crashing out a short shot of alarm.

Three of the biggest Sikhs he had ever seen in his life came running straight at him. Fortunately, a small Englishman was on their heels. He recognized Rodriguez. He yelled a command that brought the weighted swagger sticks of the Sikhs down, and erased fierceness from their faces.

"Help me get in touch with Major Cazenave," said Rodriguez.

"The major, eh," said the Englishman. "I know him well." Then he addressed one of the Sikhs, saying, "Bakhar, send a signal through to Saigon. United States Operations Mission. Major Rene Cazenave."

IN THE several hours that ensued, awaiting the arrival of Cazenave as a co-pilot in an F-111, Rodriguez and George Arthur Pinter first placed Duray, Poc Lo Nang, and the radioman in protective custody, sealed off from everyone on the field. Next, a Hong Kong police officer was instructed to bring Ling Mao over to the field. Then the two lawmen checked out the plane.

Rodriguez had guessed almost correctly about the odd scrollery ornaments. Almost. They were insets on the sides and backs of the odd passenger seats, all right. The spaces where they had been ripped out were barren now. That is, all except one, which in its sheen of

black lacquer was beautiful for Joe to contemplate, though it was not lacquered-over jade.

It was nevertheless exceedingly valuable, as undoubtedly had been the eight turned over to the Kunming official.

It was solid gold.

Rodriguez scraped the lacquer, as the Chinese Red official had done and discovered this fact. Duray had been delivering gold bullion to the Reds.

The detective pried out the lacquered metal object. It was no easy job. It lifted approximately fifty pounds. Only a man in top physical condition could handle it.

In a little while, the search came to the carton of Vodka. Rodriguez lifted the cardboard lid—and his eyes bugged out. Before him and Pinter, in compressed stacks of new crisp clean hundred-dollar bills—all bearing the still-valid authority of President Eisenhower's first Secretary of the Treasury—was $250,000.

For this quarter million dollars in American gold bills Rodriguez now figured the Red Chinese official at Kunming had accepted approximately $170,000 in gold metal. The estimate was on the basis of eight objects weighing about fifty pounds each, or a total of about four hundred pounds, at the U.S. rate of $35 an ounce Troy weight.

Rodriguez figured, too, that the one lone remaining ornament had not been just overlooked. It was waiting for either Duray or the radioman to claim for his own as a thief's bonus.

"The gold was evidently now of much greater importance to the Kunming fellow than the paper money," the British security man summed it up. "Somehow they assembled this cache of paper from banks and embassies, and now it had lain so long that it became in effect a white elephant."

A good summation, Rodriguez judged.

And so did Major Cazenave, too, when he swooped in soon after and heard details of what had happened.

"Bring in Ling Mao," said Cazenave. "He has bugged us long enough with his tale of helping our prisoners in North Vietnam. He admits only that he is a poor foundry man of Chinese nationalist sympathies. A foundryman, indeed, that makes him the perfect technician to melt down stolen Buddhist gold into what appeared to be parts of the furniture of an Oriental airliner."

Ling Mao denied being part of any plot against American or British interests. He was so sad at the charge that he laughed as he cried, an old Chinese custom.

"I take my daughter to Hong Kong to watch her," he said. "She know nothing. She make everybody hero. Bad. She let bellboys into room. They Commie Reds. Try to rope me. Fled save."

"You did melt down gold and pour it into molds," said Cazenave. "That you can't deny. My people saw you."

"You people?" said Ling Mao. "Who people?"

"Major Jack Goodrich, for one," said the major. "And the nurse Rosalie. They went to the foundry. They saw you at work with a cruicible of gold metal."

"I show them how to pour gold, make candlestick for Xa Loi Pagoda," said Ling Mao. "They mistake. Why you call me traitor, major? Ask Taiwan government. The madame, she secret head of prisoner fund to infiltrate Hanoi. Clive Robertson he with me, too. He have nephew from Australia in Hanoi Red prison. He get friends work money for prisoners bribe guards, get food, get smokes—" He broke down in confusion, evidently fearing he was not being believed at all.

"I checked out Ling's bank connection in Hong Kong," said Rodriguez. "The money he brought them today, twelve hundred dollars in U.S. gold bills, was ticketed for a Taiwan bank. Granting him a profit on his black market money exchange, the deposit still amounts to a gift of a thousand dollars by Ling Mao to the prisoner fund."

"Then why does his daughter suddenly set out on a phony test-flight with this pirate Duray?" said Cazenave.

"You got me, sir," said Rodriguez. "I saw a lot of her. I'll give her the benefit of the doubt. I still don't know which side she's on."

"Bring her in," said Cazenave.

Poc Lo Nang quickly appeared from beyond the door of the detention room.

"I know you hate Poc, Fled," she cried to Joe Rodriguez. "You think me Hari Mata, old time biggerer spy. Ha, ha. You wrong, kiddo. Why I go with Eddie Duray? My honored father die, if I no go. That why, baby. You know truth, you see VC try murder Papa in Cornwallis room. My father he topside man in Kunming before I born. My father friend of great General Chennaurt. My father respected. Now Eddie Duray come, say my father die if I do not go as hostier to guarantee trade for papers money."

Joe Rodriguez judged that she had meant hostage. That is, the Reds knew all about Ling Mao, former Chiang Kai Shek official in Kunming. They wanted someone known to them as honest to guarantee the honesty of the arriving metal and its weight for the agreed discount value in gold bills. The transaction necessarily had to be quickly executed; was like a simple black-market exchange.

With Ling Mao out of circulation recovering in the hotel room, the man Duray had no chance to kidnap him for the task. So he had convinced Poc Lo Nang by threats that she must fly to Kunming as the required hostage guarantor of good faith.

Rodriguez remained silent, thinking darkly what might have happened to her if the metal was alloyed and the weight was off.

She continued, her anger rising, "I go anywhere, do anythings for honored Papa. He have nothing now. Except dirt. Hunger. Once my father was head man of Kunming. Same as mayor man in states. He fliend Frying Tigers. He start 'em up United Nations Cafe for American fighters. Plenty peppermint girls. Fun. Go-go bang. Poops to you, Fled."

She spat towards Joe's shirt, falling short by a foot.

"Poc Lo Nang, you will swear this in a military court?" said Cazenave.

"Do."

"You will confirm what Duray said to you about getting the camouflaged gold from an unknown Saigon VC, a metal worker, and you will repeat what he told you about arranging for the No. Two engine of the airplane to conk out on schedule and so require a convenient night test-flight? And you will confront Duray if necessary and confirm his threat on your father's life if you didn't fly to Kunming as a substitute witness or hostage?"

"Of course, of course," said Poc Lo Nang.

"We'll give you the chance to tell your story where it counts," said Cazenave. "Charter an airplane, Joe, and put Ling and his daughter aboard, in handcuffs and under guard."

"As for Eddie Duray," George Arthur Pinter said, "the Indo Airway headquarters happens to be in Malibar, East Africa, of all places. Probably for tax reasons. So we are bound by treaty to deliver him there for such trial as Malibar authorities care to institute—"

"Which is probably none," muttered Cazenave.

"Quite true, Rene," said the Squadron Leader." In which case, Her Majesty's Crown Colony will proscribe him forthwith from ever setting foot in Hong Kong. Punishment enough, old boy."

In a DC-8 VIP-modified jet, Major Cazenave and Sergeant Rodriguez sat back in leather chairs, puffing away contentedly on extra fine cigars. Poc Lo Nang was sleep on Papa's shoulder in the rear seats. She looked as peaceful and warm as a kitten.

The coastal waters of Vietnam, 35,000 feet below in the night, shimmered with the silver trace of a waning half moon. The hour was past three, local clock time.

"Joe," said the major, "the people back home may never ever know of the amazing thing you've done, going into the heart of Red China. But Washington will, I guarantee you that. I wouldn't be surprised if you get the Silver Star, and Chuck Finn too, posthumously.

"Now you know why I had you on what you probably thought was

a monotonous and meaningless tail job. I had a feeling that little Poc was one of those catnip gals that all old Toms like Duray smell out and use for their own purposes. I wanted another cat ready to snap 'em.

"Now I'm going to tell you something funny and it's only because you've been suddenly dumped into a different league that you'll find it hard to understand. I'm going to recommend that Poc and her Old Man are not prosecuted on the basis of their declarations.

"We've killed off the plot to flood the Vietnamese uppercrust with riches in gold bill bribes. That was our first and only goal, to put the brakes on further treachery sell-outs by exposing the source. The Chinese Reds dare not make such cozy moves again, for they know that facts will be released and world opinion will be massed against them. Whatever they have left in their currency hoard, they'll probably bury in a Swiss numbered secret account. So if Ling Mao's record is what George Pinter said it was, then it's best for us to leave Ling alone. Politics is not our cup of tea."

"But this bum Duray getting off practically free—" Joe Rodriguez started to argue.

"Look, kid, this is Asia," said Cazenave. "It's not like collaring a weirdo on Sunset Boulevard. This is Asia, where most people don't seem to know who they are for or what they are for, or for how long. But don't believe it for a minute. "Don't worry about your friend Duray. Asians have long memories and long knives. He'll pay."

Joe Rodriguez nodded. He was suddenly very tired. Saigon would seem very good when he got there.

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by THEODORE STURGEON

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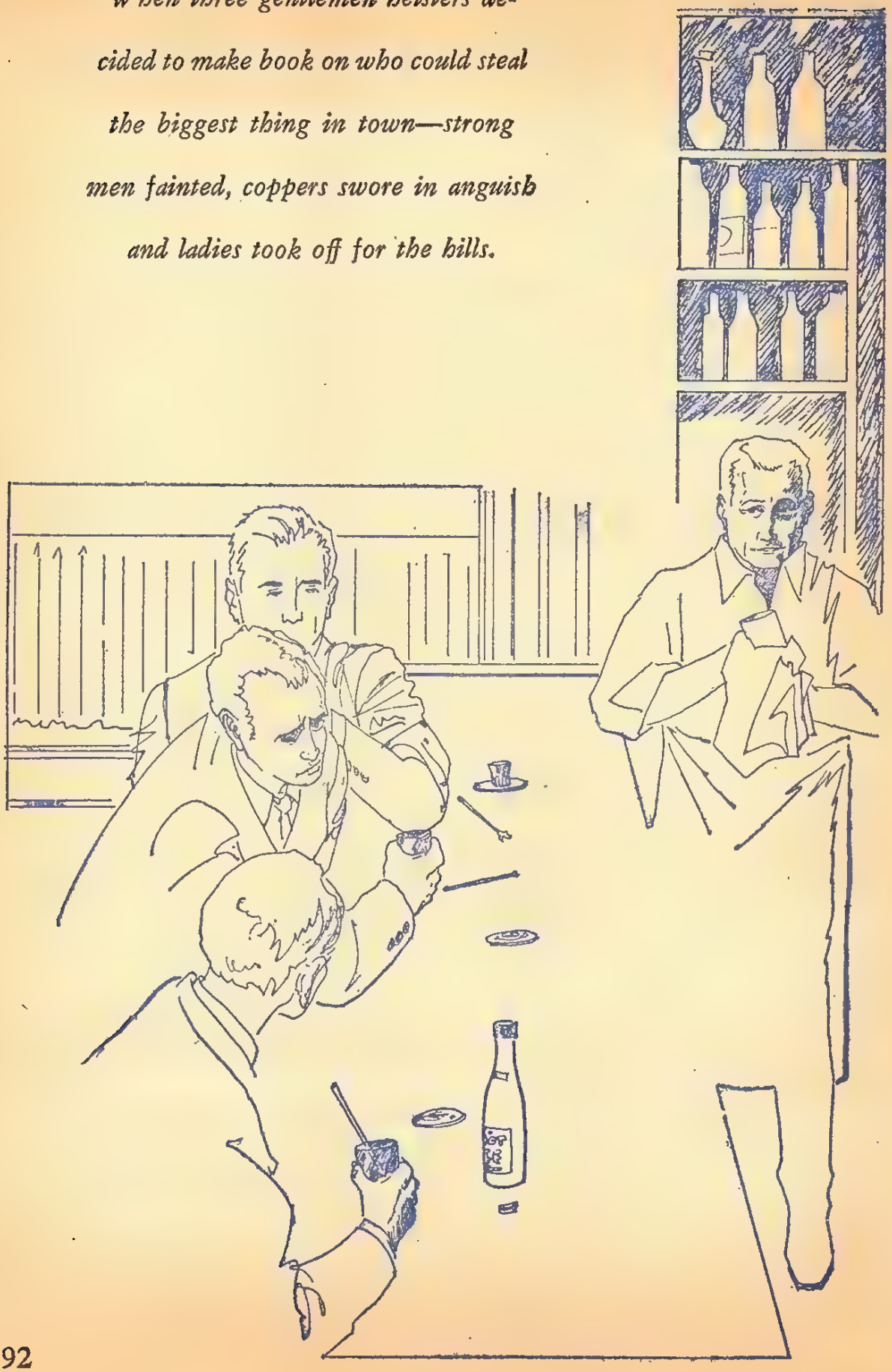
When three gentlemen heisters decided to make book on who could steal the biggest thing in town—strong men fainted, coppers swore in anguish and ladies took off for the hills.



THE HEIST

by GLORIA GONZALES

IT WAS NEAR closing when the three guys walked into Kelly's bar.

It'd been a slow night. Hardly any of the regulars had stopped by, and the bartender was glad to see the lively trio. He had intended to close up soon—there was an old war movie on the Late, Late Show he wanted to see—but now that Patrick, Levy, and Angie had come in he knew he wouldn't get home till around five o'clock.

The hell with the movie, he thought, and polished a spot at the end of the bar. "Down here." He waved them over. "I cleaned off a place for you."

"Whadda ya say there, Kelly?" Patrick plopped a bill on the bar.

"How's it going?" Angelo greeted him, taking the next stool.

"No complaints. What are you guys having, tap?"

"On payday?" howled Pat. "Fix us up with some Scotch. We can drink that other junk all next week."

The bartender paused in front of Levy. "What can I get you?"

He knew his customers' preferences and the little man wasn't a hard drinker. The most he could be coaxed into having was a rum and coke, and at that his limit was two. The man usually stuck to root beer and at Kelly's there were always a few bottles on hand for him.

"Give me a glass of root beer. No ice."

Levy was the quietest of the trio. A small, thin, balding man in his early forties, he looked something like an owl. His face was drawn and angular with a long, thin nose that separated two large gray eyes. Everything about him, from his skittish movements to his high-pitched voice, was bird-like,

even down to his long, skinny fingers.

Pat plunked his finger in the glass and swished the cubes around. He smacked the liquor off his finger and called over to Kelly. "Any of the guys stop in tonight?" he asked.

The bartender systematically dunked a glass in a pan of suds, rinsed it in the sink, dried it with his apron towel, and set it face down on the stainless steel drain board atop the bar. It was a habit he'd gotten into years back, before he went into business for himself. His boss didn't like the help to waste time chatting with the customers, but if you made out you were washing glasses during the conversation then it was all right.

"It's been deader than the morgue around here. Shorty stopped in for a container and then beat it. Al came in for a couple and left right away. Had to take the wife shopping."

Pat slid his glass toward Kelly. He leaned back on the high-backed stool and lit a cigarette. A tall, solidly built, muscular Irishman, Pat was the youngest and most gregarious of the three. He was in his middle thirties but looked ten years younger.

Pat was also the loudest of the trio and the undisputed leader. He was a brute of a man, over six feet tall but his broad shoulders minimized his height. With his bushy tangle of red hair and long sideburns, he was the most striking of his companions.

Angelo, again, was a complete departure from his pals: short, dark, wavy-haired, he was the lover. He liked flashy clothes—white on white shirts, black suits, striped ties—and music, any kind, as long as it was loud. He was always the first one over to the jukebox and frequented only the bars that catered to his musical demands.

Unlike his two buddies, he was a bachelor. Not that there weren't a lot of women around eager to snare him, but Angie wasn't having any. The way he told it there wasn't any one woman worth forfeiting the better pleasures of life for. He did offer one concession. Angie said that when he found one that looked like Sophia Loren and could play pool like Mosconi he'd consider marriage.

But only if she could outdrink him, play poker, win at dominoes, handicap the prize fights, appreciate football, basketball, hockey and soccer, and also cook pizza like his mother. She'd have to make more money than him too.

The three worked at the same glass plant where Pat was the foreman. They lived within a mile of each other in the East Bronx. Pat and Angie had hung around together for years before Levy came to work at the plant. Maybe at first they had just wanted to protect him, sort of take him under their wing.

But after a few weeks, Levy was more than just a co-worker, he was their pal. Even if he didn't like to drink he was fun to have around. Besides, there was nobody anywhere who could handicap the trotters like Levy. When it came to the track, the little man had the first and final word on how the trio betted. Patrick had already bought a station wagon with his winnings.

"Where you guys been tonight?" asked Kelly. "I was about ready to lock up and go home when you came in."

"We went to a movie downtown," said Angie. "Kelly, you gotta see this one. It's all about these guys that steal a fortune from the museum. It was really great!"

"I'll see it when it comes on television. With this job I ain't got enough time to die." He filled their glasses again.

"I tell you, Kelly," Pat said, "one heist like that and you don't have to work the rest of your life. All anyone needs is the brains. There ain't nothing that can't be copped if you go about it right."

Levy shook his head. "Not me. With my luck I'd hold up a place that was having a policeman's convention in the back room. I'll stick to the horses."

"You could do it," Angie told him. "I gotta go along with Pat. You'd be surprised what anyone can do if they just put their mind to it. But if right off the bat you start thinking you're gonna get nabbed, then you can damn bet you will."

The bartender asked, "Sort of mind over matter?"

"I guess you can call it that," Angie said. "What do you think, Pat?"

The Irishman cupped his hand to his chin and stared pensively across the bar. He'd been thinking the same thing all night, even before they left the movie. He hadn't let on to the fellows, but that movie had really gotten to him. He couldn't get it off his mind. He spun slowly on the stool, leaned his elbow on the bar and faced his companions.

"I'll tell you what I think. I think we could make those sharpies look like rookies. That's what I think."

Levy was taken back at the seriousness of his tone. "But *we're* not criminals."

"That's just it!" Pat thundered. "If we pulled a caper it would be just for the hell of it. Not like those guys. It's always the pros that get nabbed. You take some average Joe like us who holds down a good steady job, who's got just about everything he wants—a family, nice car, kids, a little savings put away, a few bucks in the pocket at the end of the week—that's the type the cops never suspect. They're too busy Mafia-hunting."

Angelo feigned anger. "Hey,

watch that! I don't talk about your family."

Pat grinned. "Give him a drink. I insulted him."

"Make it J & B," Angie called to the bartender. "Any time this guy buys you gotta take advantage."

Kelly took the bottle from the shelf and poured Angie a shot. Pat gestured to him to fill his own glass. Kelly thanked him and did so.

"Pat, don't tell me you're thinking of pulling a job." The bartender laughed.

Patrick challenged him. "You think I couldn't?"

"Go on." Angie waved him away. "If any one of us could get away with a thing like that it would be me. Howda ya think I can afford all my suits and that big car parked outside? On what I make at the plant?"

"Bull!" Pat shot back. "Anybody can run numbers. What I'm talking about is different, a real caper. Just for the hell of it. Not a bank or anything like that. But just to steal something—something big nobody ever stole before."

Levy looked at his friend and shook his head. "You'd get caught in a minute."

Pat didn't say anything. He picked up his glass and sipped it slowly, deep in thought. His pals, too, were quiet. They watched him closely. Suddenly Patrick burst out laughing. He got off the stool and walked over to where Levy sat. He put his huge hand on the skinny shoulder.

"You're a betting man," he said. "You want a piece of the action that says I can pull off something big, something you've never heard of anybody stealing?"

The little man looked at him for a second and then went back to his root beer. "Aw, you're crazy."

Pat took out his wallet. "My money says I ain't." He placed five ten-dollar bills under the glass of soda. "If you really think I'm so crazy—match it! Make yourself an easy fifty."

Levy looked over at him and laughed. "How do I collect, on visiting days?"

"Kelly here'll hold it, won't ya?" Pat asked the bartender.

The man nodded. "Sure."

Satisfied, Patrick turned back to Levy. "Are you in?"

The little man looked at the bartender, fingered the bills in front of him, and with a broad grin replied, "Sure, I'm in."

Angie jumped off his stool and slapped his hand on top of the money. "Hey, what about me? Ain't my money any good? I want in too."

"Your money's good. Get it up," said Pat.

Angie and Levy threw their share on the bar. Patrick picked it up and handed it over to Kelly.

"Wait a minute. Wait just a

minute," said Angie. "What say we make this more kosher?" He flipped open his wallet. "Here's another fifty that says I can steal anything bigger and better than you. Whadda ya say to that?" he challenged his pal.

Pat gave him a long look and then reached for his billfold. "I say you got a big mouth and here's my fifty to shut it for you."

Angie chuckled out loud. "You got yourself a deal. We'll let Levy here judge who wins."

"Fair enough," Pat agreed.

In the next half-hour, aided by suggestions from Kelly and Levy, the two men decided on the ground rules. It was agreed that they would operate independently, pull the job the following day and meet later that night at Kelly's with the goods. No restrictions were placed on the items to be stolen, only that the swag be big and something nobody would think of copping.

Kelly stuffed the money into a paper bag and hid it in the freezer for safe keeping. The trio had another round of drinks and each went his separate way.

PROMPTLY at eight in the morning the Music Mart had its first customer for the day. The dark-haired, well-dressed man brushed away the anxious salesman with "I'm just looking around" and went about his browsing.

The Music Mart, located downtown, was one of the oldest and most reputable establishments in the city. The store covered an area a half-a-city-block wide. It dealt in all musical instruments from the harmonica to the harp. The second floor of the building housed some of the most expensive pianos in the world.

They ranged in size and style from the most imposing to the antique, rinkety-tink piano-roll high-backs. The management prided itself on having equipped every famous concert hall in the country and abroad. Almost every theatre playbill and concert and opera program credited the Music Mart for its instruments.

The customer casually inspected each piano with an air of professional detachment. Now and then he'd gesture toward the floor manager and inquire into the technical construction and quality of a

chosen piece. The customer recognized the virtue of each superior piece of merchandise and appeared to be somewhat of an authority on pianos. This was immediately evident to the manager, who more than once had to consult his personal files for information the prospective buyer sought.

Approximately a half-hour later, part of which time the customer spent fingering Gershwin's Rhapsody on various pianos, it appeared that the man had narrowed his choice between two stately black models.

The manager was ecstatic. The customer had selected the two most expensive in the entire collection.

Still, the buyer was not one to be influenced by any sales pressure, so the floor manager made it his business to be almost disinterested but rapidly available for any and all assistance. From a distance he caught a glimpse of the man bending down to examine one of the two pianos—a move which met with the department head's approval. So few people, he had found, really know or care what they purchase.

But here was a man who took the time to examine the entire floor collection and then having stated his preference further investigated before making his decision. He couldn't see the customer now. He must be checking the pedals, the manager assumed.

Shortly after, the customer walked up to the manager, complimented him on the workmanship and quality of his merchandise and promised to return later in the week to formulate the sale. The bubbling salesman thanked him, escorted him to the door and—answering the question put to him—said it would not be necessary to leave a deposit: the instrument would be available at any time he decided on the purchase.

The manager bade him a cheery farewell. It was a rare pleasure to deal with such a person.

Hours later, shortly after the floor manager returned from lunch, the character walked in. That's the way the senior salesman described him later, "A real character."

The person in question was a sallow-complexioned, hunched-over workman in white fatigues. He spoke in a broken, sing-song, comical English that resembled one of those exaggerated Italian apple vendors that Hollywood created. He even wore a dark handlebar mustache.

The manager was conferring with one of his salesmen when the laborer barged in, waving a clipboard.

"Hey buddy,"—the man jabbed the manager with a pencil—"you got a piano for me here?"

The department head regrouped his dignity. "I beg your pardon."

"I come here to get a piano.

Number 84765 dash G 23. You give me, I take it away."

"How is that again?" the manager inquired softly.

"Look buddy, you don't understand English? I repeat you again. I come here"—he gestured excitedly with a closed fist—"to pick up Number 84765 dash G 23."

No response.

"This the Music Mart?" The workman consulted the sheets on his clipboard.

The manager coughed a weak "Yes."

"Well, then I come to the right place. You give me the piano, I take it."

The department executive was losing his patience. "Take it where, my good man? What piano?"

The man let out a torrent of words, the furor of which was conveyed only by the tone and anger in his bellowing voice. "Number 84765 dash G 23. You deaf or something? How many times I got to tell you. Number 84—"

"Never mind, never mind," the manager tried to quiet him. "Where did you say this piano is going?"

The workman too was losing his patience. He jammed his fists on his hips and regarded the manager with a threatening glare usually reserved for women drivers and dog beaters. "To the factory." He almost spat the words. "Where else?"

"But what is wrong with the piano?" The salesman inquired in soothing tones.

"How should I know?" the workman barked at him. "Do I ask my boss how to run his business? He tells me to go here and do this and I go and I do it. So just give me the piano, buddy, and I go. This is my lunch, I want to tell you."

The manager brightened. "You must be from our factory then, right?"

"Now you got it. They send me to get the piano."

"All right. Let me see that serial number again." The manager took the paper from the workman and called for the maintenance over the intercom system. Three burly men appeared in short order and began inspecting the underside of each piano on the floor.

One of them called out, "Here she is."

The manager walked over, followed quickly by the workman in white fatigues. "Why—" The department head gagged. "That's the one the gentleman was looking at this morning. There can't be anything wrong with this piano."

"I don't care if President Johnson was here this morning. All I want is 84765 dash G 23. You say this it? I take it?"

The manager threw his hands in the air. The front office was always cramping his sales. Automatically he signed the paper held

out to him and instructed the crew to load it on the truck.

The workman was beaming. "Now I can go eat." The crew hoisted the piano on a steel platform and wheeled it from the showroom into the freight elevator.

AT JUST about the same time, across the city, business was going on full-scale at French's Department Store. A one-day clearance sale had attracted the throngs since early morning. Shoppers bustled each other through the aisles and haggled over the marked-down goods strewn atop the counters.

The mighty sales force had been strengthened, in anticipation of the thousands that would flock here after reading the full-page ads placed in every New York newspaper. Extra guards were stationed at all doors and throughout the store's eight floors where, before the day was over, twelve kids would be lost, two women would faint from heat prostration, four pocketbooks would be snatched, and at least one unsuspecting floor manager would be slugged with a bulky shopping bag by an irate customer screaming "false advertising."

Into this war-torn disaster area sauntered one brave male. Dressed in green coveralls and carrying a battered steel tool case, he shuffled his way through the frantic females and headed toward the elevators. Approaching a porter who was busy emptying the sand-filled ashtrays, he asked to be directed to the maintenance department. The custodian pointed to an exit that led to the basement. The man nodded and carried his tool case down the stairs.

Within seconds he entered a small office occupied by four men. They were seated around a table, the wax paper of their sandwiches strewn around them amid cardboard coffee containers. He addressed the one with his big feet propped on the table.

"One of you guys here want to show me where the master electrical box is?"

The one with his feet up, devouring a gushy tunafish sandwich, mumbled, "What for?"

"Have to service the escalators."

The crew looked at the man, horror-stricken.

"You mean *now?* Right today?" A little guy jumped to his feet.

"Yep. The equipment's due for a cleaning and a check," he told them.

"Are you all together crazy?" The first guy jumped up from behind the table. "Do you have any idea what's going on up there?" He pointed his thumb at the ceiling. "This is a sale day, mister. There must be ten thousand nuts running around up there. And you want to tie up the escalators? Do you know what you're asking for?" A piece of tunafish went splatter-

ing across the room out of his mouth.

"All I know is my boss sent me out to check 'em over. I'll do one at a time—at the most a half-an-hour apiece. Only one will be out of commission at a time. The elevators can handle the traffic." The stranger in green coveralls took a cigarette and put it to his mouth.

It was evident the boss wasn't happy.

"Listen," he told him, "we always have you guys come in at night after the store's closed. How come it's got to be done right now, today, when we're carrying a bigger load?"

The man puffed on his cigarette. "Because that's the way my company wants it. There's talk of a strike down there next week and they want to get all the work done they can, in case it comes off. If we do strike, and your equipment isn't checked out, you might even have to close off all your escalators till the strike is over and we can get someone over here to run the inspection."

The little guy sat back down. "He's right, boss." He spoke to the man behind the table. "Remember the time the safety chief shut down the elevators till we got someone to come over right away for the monthly check?"

He had struck a chord. You could almost see the rapid calculations flicking through the man's head.

"Yeah," he drawled. "Yeah." He was getting the picture and he didn't like what he saw. "We got all kinds of hell that time." Now he was on the defensive. "How'd I know it was time for the monthly check? The service guys keep a record of those things. I got enough work around here to worry about."

He took another swipe at his sandwich. "Well, I guess you better show this guy where the box is," he directed his partner. "Let's hope these dames don't throw a fit when they find out they gotta walk instead of ride. Not that those witches couldn't use the exercise."

The little man got up and led the way out to a narrow corridor in the basement. He pointed out the box and which switches controlled certain stairs. The repair man jotted down the information, made a few pencil scratchings on the box plate and thanked the janitor, telling him he could handle it alone from there. The custodian went back to his lunch muttering something about "strikes."

The repair man pulled the switch disconnecting the third-floor escalator which ran up to the fourth floor. He picked up his toolcase, rang for the elevator, and rode it upstairs.

He got off on the third floor and made his way directly toward the escalator. Opening his tool box, he took out a round, wooden stick which he extended to the width of the stairs, approximately four feet.

He also produced a bright orange flag, boldly imprinted with the lettering, *"out of order."* He swirled the material over the stick and walked up the immobile staircase, where he inserted a similar contraption at the top.

Working from there, he jammed a thin screwdriver between the stairs and the side panels. The top piece came loose after a slight tug and fell on the one below like an accordion. He repeated this process, walking backwards down the stairs, until the entire escalator lay folded at the bottom, uncovering a deep gaping hole where the stairs had been. He unlocked the final step on the floor level and placed the neatly stacked package near his toolcase.

As a safety precaution he placed one of the store's signs—a huge, glass-enclosed floor directory on stilts—in front of the open shaft. Taking from his tool box a wide sticker which read, *"stairs out, use elevator,"* he slapped it across the barricade.

This accomplished, the man picked up his case and hooked it to a special catch on his belt. His arms free, he bent over and retrieved the accordion stairs from the floor and walked out of the building.

IT WAS a little after ten that evening when Patrick walked into Kelly's. Angelo was sitting at the end of the bar, deep in some conspiracy with the bartender. From the loud, raucous tone of his laugh, Pat could tell he'd been there quite awhile. It took a healthy amount of liquor to affect Angie and from the way he was carrying on—one arm draped around Kelly's neck, the other swinging his glass to the music from the jukebox—it didn't require a keen eye to spot that Angie was well on his way to a capital binge.

"Hey, lookie who just came in!" Angelo sang out. "If it ain't Willie Sutton himself. Whadda ya say, pal? If you're real sweet to me, I'll buy ya a drink." Then to Kelly, "Give'm anything he wants."

Pat pulled up the next stool. "Make it Scotch," he told the bartender.

"Give'm a double," Angie called out. "He's paying for it."

Patrick looked at his friend and chuckled. "I thought you were buying."

"I most certainly am," Angie informed him, weaving around to face him. "But—" He started laughing again and held on to the bar for support—"I'm using your money. Your beautiful, green, one hundred bills, in fact." This thought so amused him that he grabbed on to the back of the stool to avoid toppling over.

Pat could not ever remember seeing his friend in such a state of intoxication.

"All right," he told him. "I'll play your silly game. Just how do

you figure to get a hundred bills out of me?"

"The bet, you ugly Irishman, how else? Remember last night? We put up all that nice, pretty money?"

He was still laughing.

"Oh," replied Pat, in mock surprise, "*that* money. I see. You figure you won, is that it?"

Angie slapped his palm on the bar.

"Tell him," he gestured at Kelly, "tell him." Even the bartender couldn't help laughing. He bent down below the bar in the pretense of searching for something.

"We made a bet, you and me, right in front of Kelly here and I won. So go head, have another drink. I can afford it."

Pat threw his arm around his buddy's shoulder and patted him on the arm. "That's what I like about you. You're all heart."

The bartender came up with a bottle and poured himself and the two men a drink. Kelly liked Pat, he always had. He was going to hate to see the guy lose, but in a way he was glad that Angie would win the bet.

Anyone who could've pulled off what he did, deserved to, in his estimation. Kelly had been there earlier in the day when Angie and three others unloaded the piano from the rented delivery truck. They'd hauled the thing in and shoved it to the rear of the bar next to the pool table where it now stood concealed by a wide burlap canvas.

"Levy been in tonight?" asked Pat.

"I haven't seen him all night," Kelly told him.

"I don't figure we need him anyway," said Angie. "You can give out the prize money, right?" he asked Kelly. "I'm sure Pat here'll go along with whoever you say wins."

Pat looked at the man and nodded. "That's all right with me. Levy probably got tied up at home."

That having been settled, Angie took up his glass, downed the contents, and sprang to his feet. "Okay. Whaddya ya say we get it over with? I only got the truck for twenty-four hours and I still have to get this thing out of here."

Pat spread his hands apart. "Fine with me. Let me go out to the car first. I have to get something." With that he walked out of the bar. He returned in a few minutes with a big, square package wrapped in heavy brown paper.

Angie eyed him with suspicion. He knew his pal was crafty. "That it?" he gestured with a thumb.

"Yep."

Angie thought it over. He walked around Pat's stool, stared at the package, jabbed at it a few times with his finger, felt the weight of it, and then with a solemn look at his pal, burst out laughing. "Hey, Kelly," he shouted. "Give Pat here

another drink. He's gonna need it."

Pat placed the bundle on the bar next to his change and cigarettes. "Think you got me beat, huh?

"I sho' as hell do," Angelo challenged him. "Anything you got wrapped in that little thing, I got beat by a mile. Remember the rules now. You made them yourself. Something big."

Pat told him, "I remember."

The bartender could no longer restrain himself. "I think he's got you, Pat." Kelly chuckled. He was remembering Angie's face when he and the guys carted the piano in. They were laughing and carrying on like a gang of drunken schoolboys playing hookey.

Angie had bought drinks for everyone in the place, even the stragglers that wandered in. When the bar cleared out around dinner time, Angie filled Kelly in on his caper, describing in complete detail the manager's befuddled actions, and both had been laughing over it ever since.

"You really think so, huh, Kelly?" Pat asked. The bartender gave him a wide grin. "Well, if you say so. But I'd like him to prove it to me first."

Angie jumped off his stool. "Right this way."

Pat followed him to the rear of the bar where, with a sweeping flourish comparable only to Monte Cristo's flexing of his sword, Angelo flung the canvas aside to expose the majestic piece of furniture.

Patrick let out a long, slow whistle. "Not bad. Not bad at all." He never took his eyes off the piano. He walked slowly around it, standing back to gain the full view. "I didn't think you had it in you." He slapped his friend on the back.

"Aw, it was nothing really." Angie grinned at Kelly who was chuckling and shaking his head. "Nothing that a genius couldn't have pulled off."

Pat shook his head. "No. I really mean it. You did yourself proud. That's not bad at all." His fingers wandered over the high-polished surface. "But"— He gently replaced the canvas over the instrument— "I'm afraid it's just not good enough."

With that he walked back to his stool and sat down.

Angie's mouth dropped open. He looked at Kelly. The bartender was no longer laughing. Quickly recovering himself, Angie stormed over to where his friend sat sipping his drink.

"You got something better?" He challenged him angrily. "In there? In that little thing?"

"Yep."

Angelo was fuming now. He hadn't been this mad since the time his forty-to-one shot dropped dead ten feet before the finish line.

"Well supposing you just show me," he demanded.

Kelly hovered anxiously over the

bar. Having seen the piano, he hadn't anticipated any contest.

"Okay, pal." Pat flashed him his brightest smile. He began untying the string on the package, humming all the while. "Excuse me," he nudged his pal out of the way.

Before their astonished eyes he lifted the steel package out of its wrapping and began unfolding the staircase along the entire length of the bar.

Kelly and Angie watched dumfounded.

Pat continued on his task until the entire flight of stairs lay stretched before them from one end of the bar to the other.

"An escalator!" Angie choked. "I'll be damned!"

Kelly had a fit of coughing. "How the hell—"

Angie turned his back and walked over to his stool. "Pay the man," he told Kelly. His voice was suddenly hoarse.

Kelly walked into the back room, shaking his head. He came out with the paper sack. He took the bills and put them on the bar in front of the redheaded Irishman.

"Thank you, gentlemen," said Pat. "Now let's all have a drink."

Angie dropped back on his stool and cradled his chin in his hands. All he could say over and over was, "I wouldn't have believed it if the Pope had told me."

"I think I can use one too," said Kelly, pouring himself a shot.

Just then the bar door was thrown open. Levy stood there. "Hey, Pat, Angie, you got a minute?"

Pat looked up. "Where the hell you been?"

Levy didn't answer. Instead he dashed back out the door.

Pat took a slug of his drink, emptied it, picked up his winnings and followed Angie out the door.

Outside, Levy was nowhere to be seen. It was now about eleven o'clock and the streets were deserted except for a squad car parked halfway up the block.

"Now where the hell did he go?" asked Pat.

Angie shrugged, "Don't ask me."

Suddenly the dark figure that had been sitting quietly behind the wheel of the police car opened the door and walked out into the street.

Pat looked in the direction of the noise. He started to turn away and then stopped abruptly. "The dog," he gasped.

The dark figure slapped the green, white and black New York City patrol car. A yellow glow from the overhead lamppost framed him leaning against the fender.

"You like it?" Levy grinned.

Patrick and Angelo looked at each other in disbelief. Angie was the first one to recover and speak.

"Pay the man," he said. And walked back to the bar in disgust.

Pat threw the bills onto the hood of the car and followed his pal into Kelly's.

Maybe he wasn't so much of a man, my pop. But enough of one to know what he had to hold and love—and when he must kill to keep it . . .

A Detective Story

by CLAYTON MATTHEWS

I'M SURE every boy daydreams of his father being a detective.

I know I did. Of course, I was an avid reader of detective story magazines. I used to hide them behind my books during study periods whenever I could afford to buy a new one. This was during the thirties, you understand. The country was stagnating in the iron grip of the depression, and even a dime was hard to come by for a boy of fourteen.

My father was nothing like the detectives I read about in the magazines. He was a big man, well over six feet, with graying black hair, a broad face with a generous nose and deepset gray eyes.

He got on well with people, especially other men. On courthouse lawns on town days, on evenings after he'd closed the store, he would hunker down to whittle with the men, big black pipe fuming, his laughter booming out. That was about the only time he laughed anymore. The depression had defeated him. Today, he would have been a successful salesman, but who in those days had money to buy?

He was fifty, eighteen years older than my mother.

My mother was small and slim and golden, with a heart-shaped face and grave blue eyes.

She had been eighteen, teaching her first year of school, when she married my father. I was born the same year.

As it turned out, I was the only child. There had been one more,

still-born, a birth that did something to my mother inside. Her health was never what you might call good afterwards. Not that she wasted away or anything like that. To me she only became more beautiful. She had a fragile beauty that was at opposites with most women made old before thirty in the harsh West Texas environment of those years.

The way we knocked around did nothing for her health, but I never heard her complain, not directly. She endured it all in silence. Ever since I could remember we had wandered over the states of Texas and Oklahoma like gypsies in the summer and fall, household goods piled high on the old truck. My father would sometimes work in the fields, sometimes sharecrop a worn-out farm.

Nothing ever seemed to work out right. The job would peter out, a drouth would ruin the crop, or some other stroke of bad luck would hit him. I caught what schooling I could between moves.

It was late July of that year when we drove down the unpaved highway and saw the empty store with the *For Rent* sign. It stood where two roads crossed and was actually a combination filling station and store, with a lone gas pump standing like a sentinel in front.

My father parked the truck between the pump and the front of the building and got out without a word. My mother looked at the countryside, with not another building in sight except for the schoolhouse across the road, looked at the weathered, unpainted front with a loose sign flapping in the wind, and then leaned her head back with a sigh.

I wanted to go with my father while he peered into the dirty windows and then disappeared around the back, but I felt I should stay with her.

Finally he returned, walking in that slow stride that meant he was thinking hard, tamping tobacco into his pipe.

"What do you think, Mary?"

My mother opened her eyes. "Think about what, Henry?"

"Well, it has living quarters in back, a kitchen, sitting room, bedroom. I reckon it could be fixed up. And I'm sure I can get gas and oil, auto accessories on credit. Candy and things for the kids, a few groceries maybe. I reckon we've got enough money for a few things like that to start off. And there's the school for young Sam—"

He roughed my hair with a big hand. "Right across the road. How about that, boy? Never been so near a school before, have we?"

I held my breath, staring at my mother.

"Would it make any difference what I think?" she asked tonelessly. "How long do you suppose it'll be this time?"

My father looked around at the store, a proprietary air about him

already. "If things work out, who knows?" He glanced again at my mother. "Have a little faith, Mary."

"Faith? A little faith, Henry?" My mother got wearily down out of the truck. Then she smiled, that special smile which transformed her face into radiance. She placed her hand flat against his cheek. "All right, Henry Dowell. But even faith has its limits."

"This time it'll work out, Mary. You'll see."

But it didn't work out. At least not like my father had hoped. My mother made the living quarters livable with the few pieces of furniture we owned. My father got the gas and oil and the auto accessories on credit. The oil companies were glad to find any outlet for their products. And he stocked a few staples in the store.

The business wasn't there. There was little traffic on the roads; sometimes hours would pass without a single car stopping and often then only for air or water.

There weren't enough people in the vicinity for a grocery trade. The few sales were small items farmers' wives had forgotten to buy in town. School was out, so there were no kids to buy the candy my father stocked.

Things went wrong from the start. In the first flush of hope my father bought fresh vegetables and fruits to sell. And most of it spoiled without being sold. A month after moving in he bought a truckload of Long Tom watermelons at a bargain in town.

"These won't spoil," he said happily. "The folks around here can't raise good melons, so they'll be glad to buy these."

Perhaps they would have, but the weather turned hot the very next day. For over a week it never dropped below a hundred, night or day.

The ice truck came by three days a week and left ice for the pop cooler, but enough ice to keep the melons cool would have cost more than they were worth. We couldn't even keep them wetted down with water. Our drinking water came from a rain cistern, and water for the cars we kept in a barrel by the gas pump, water my father hauled by truck from the river four miles away. On the second day the melons, already ripe when my father bought them, began to go bad. A couple burst, drawing flies.

My mother sighed. "All right, Henry. Haul them away somewhere."

"They didn't really cost too much, Mary. Ten dollars for the whole truckload. If the weather hadn't turned off hot . . ."

After that, my father wasn't around the store quite so much as before. He left me to attend to what business there was. He drove into town almost every day. I didn't mind. I was proud he'd trust me to run the store.

He was usually back in time for

supper. Even at my age I'd noticed my father and my mother had grown more and more silent with one another as the years passed. Sometimes a whole evening would go by without a word being exchanged. After the watermelons they seemed to have even less to say.

After supper my father would go out front. Sometimes he'd keep the store open awhile. Other times he left it dark and hunkered down with the men who had strolled over to swap lies with him. Most folks thereabouts had never been out of the county and liked to hear my father yarn about other parts of the state. Long after I'd settled down on my cot behind the counter in the store, I could hear the rumble of their voices.

Mr. Graham came to get the school ready two weeks before opening day. A bachelor, he boarded at a farm a mile up the road and walked down to the little schoolhouse every day.

I couldn't wait for school to start; I'd never had a man teacher before.

The first afternoon he walked over to the store. Mr. Graham was a slight, slender man. His skin was pale, seemingly untouched by the fierce Texas sun. My first thought was that he must stay indoors a lot, or maybe he had been sick. His hair was dark, his eyes a pale gray. He was around thirty.

The thing that surprised me the most was the way he was dressed. A suit and a tie. The only people I'd ever seen wearing a suit and a tie in the middle of the week were a few drummers. Not even all preachers wore them.

He introduced himself in a soft voice, and I told him who I was.

His smile was friendly. "I expect you'll be going to school across the road when the term begins?"

He'd crossed over for a pack of ready-made cigarettes. That was another thing: Most folks I knew made their own cigarettes. My father had bought a carton when he'd stocked the store, and there was only one pack gone.

My mother came in from the back just then. She fretted about my being there all alone and often came in when she heard voices.

I said importantly, "This here is Mr. Graham, the teacher I'll be having when school starts."

One hand came up to touch her hair. "How do you do, Mr. Graham?"

He came over every afternoon from then on, sometimes for a pack of cigarettes, sometimes for a bottle of pop or a candy bar.

I had gotten acquainted with the neighborhood boys by this time. In the last week before school, my mother let me go off to play with them for a few hours in the afternoon and she minded the store.

One afternoon I came home a little early and saw my father's truck parked beside the store. There was

nobody in the front. I started toward the back. I stopped short when I heard angry voices coming from the sitting room. I stood very still, listening.

"Why, Mary, why?"

"Why, Henry? After fifteen years you should know why. I guess my faith has just plain wore out."

"I'm sorry about that, Mary." My father's voice had a broken sound. "I've tried—"

"You're sorry! How many times have I heard that, Henry? There've been so many things for you to be sorry for. I wish I could say I'm sorry, too, but I can't find it in me."

"Mary, please listen! You just can't—"

I tiptoed away. I'd heard enough. I'd heard too much. For years I'd known my father was a failure, a man always full of big plans that never came to anything. But it was no disgrace to be a failure in those days. Certainly I didn't love him the less for it. I reckon I'd always been afraid my mother would get fed up someday. Yet it was funny that the breaking point should come over a truckload of watermelons.

I wondered if she was going to leave him. I wondered which one I would go with, which one would want me.

She had no idea of leaving him. I found that out a few days later, the morning school started.

My clothes were kept in a closet in the store. I always got dressed in the store, folded up the bed clothes and the cot and put them away in the closet. On that first morning of school I dressed in my best, clean shirt and khaki pants, both freshly ironed, and a new pair of tennis shoes bought especially for school.

Then I discovered I didn't have a clean handkerchief. My father was out front pumping up the gas pump, and my mother was in the kitchen fixing breakfast. I didn't want to bother her, so I looked for myself.

In the bedroom I went directly to the old chest of drawers where she kept the things she hadn't got around to ironing. There were no handkerchiefs in the top drawer. The second drawer always stuck. I pulled on it, but it still didn't budge. I gave a hard yank and the drawer came all the way out, spilling everything onto the floor, banging against the chest.

I found a clean handkerchief, stuffed it into my pocket and quickly put everything back into the drawer. I had the drawer in the chest and was turning away when I spotted something bright on the floor.

I picked it up. It was a pocket knife made in the shape of a woman's leg from knee to shapely foot with a high-heeled slipper. The Nehi salesman gave away one almost like it, except that the free ones were knife-bottle-opener combinations, the foot part the opener. The one in my hand was a knife only, and much better made, with an imitation pearl handle. The

Nehi gifts had become so popular that a knife manufacturer had copied the product, eliminating the opener feature. To the best of my knowledge, they were never very successful.

But what was it doing here?

"Sam! What are you doing?"

I whirled around. My mother stood in the doorway, face flushed from the heat of the wood cookstove.

"I came in for a clean handkerchief."

She saw the knife and came to me with her hand out. I gave it to her.

"It fell out of the drawer."

"It's a present for your father's birthday next month. His knife is old and you know how he likes to whittle."

I guess I gaped at her. A knife like that for my father? With her heat-flushed face, it was hard to tell whether she was blushing, but she closed both hands tight around the knife as though hiding it from my gaze.

"I know," she said quickly. "It's not fitting, not a proper thing to have around. I don't know what I was thinking of. I've decided to take it back and turn it in for something else."

Satisfied, I started past. She caught my arm. "Sam, you won't tell your father? It's to be a surprise."

"I won't tell."

With heart considerably lightened, I went off to school. I knew just how much she must have had to scrimp and save, scraping together the few dollars for the knife. But she certainly wouldn't have bought my father a birthday present if she meant to leave him.

Two weeks after school began I started picking in the cotton patch behind the store from after school let out until sundown. The cotton field, as well as the store, belonged to a Mr. Hunter.

One afternoon I was picking alone. It was a poor year for cotton, and Mr. Hunter couldn't afford to hire pickers. His family did most of it. I suppose the only reason he was letting me pick was because of the store. He probably figured that whatever small amount I earned made it that much easier for my father to pay the rent. On that particular afternoon Mr. Hunter's oldest son was getting married over in the next county, and the whole family had gone to the wedding.

It was nearing sundown when I heard the gunshot. I straightened up and glanced toward the store. The shot must have come from there, the only other building within a quarter mile being the schoolhouse. The only hunting done in the neighborhood was for cottontail rabbits or squirrels, and the shot I'd heard certainly hadn't been a .22 rifle. It had to be the old .45 my father kept under the counter.

I wondered if Mr. Graham had heard the shot. He often stayed at

the schoolhouse long after school was out.

As I looked toward the store, I saw a rattle-trap Chevvy pickup high tailing it up the road, trailing a cloud of dust.

I shucked out of the strap, left the half-filled cotton sack between the rows and began to run toward the store, a hundred yards away. My thoughts raced ahead of me, wondering what on earth had happened. I couldn't recall my father ever having fired that old .45. My mother hated to see anything killed. She even refused to cook the squirrels my father used to shoot, and he had finally quit hunting.

As I rounded the corner of the store, I saw my father, standing beside the gas pump, the .45 dangling from his hand, staring up the road. My mother stood at his side, pale but composed.

"What happened?" I asked.

My father turned a burning gaze on me. "I got held up, that's what happened, boy."

I saw two men hurrying toward us through the field across the road. Evidently they had been alerted by the shot. We couldn't afford a telephone, but one of the men who came over had one.

Within an hour Sheriff Wilkins came out from town.

Sheriff Wilkins was a big man, with a pot belly. He was slow-moving and—many said—slow-thinking. He always had a chew of tobacco like a marble-bulge in one cheek and wore strapped around his ample girth a .45 that could have been a mate for my father's.

He listened, nodding and now and then spitting a brown stream into the dust, as my father told his story.

My father had been inside the

store when the Chevvy pickup drove up to the door. Before he could reach the door, this medium-sized man in faded overalls, blue denim shirt and work shoes, a brown paper sack with two slits for eyeholes over his head, came boiling out of the pickup, leaving the motor running. He had been carrying a .22 rifle.

He hadn't spoken a word. No need to, for my father had known what he was after. My father had dumped all the money from the cash drawer into another paper sack the hold-up man was carrying. Then the robber had backed out the door, hopped into the pickup and took off like a scalded cat.

By the time my father got the .45 from under the counter and ran outside, the pickup was fifty yards away up the road.

The one shot my father fired had been wasted.

The sheriff chewed a moment in thought. "I reckon you didn't get the license number of the pickup?"

"It had no plate in the back. I didn't see the front."

That wasn't unusual in those days. When one or even both plates were lost few people bothered to get them replaced. It was illegal, of course, but nothing was ever done about it.

Sheriff Wilkins chewed thoughtfully, hitched at his belt and spat. "Don't seem to me there's much I can do, Mr. Dowell. From what you tell me, could be anybody."

"You mean you're going to do nothing to catch him?"

"Didn't say that. I'll do what I can. I'll pass the word around and keep a sharp lookout. That's about all I can do."

"There's one other thing, sheriff. The money—About forty dollars, all told. Except for a couple of dollar bills, it was all silver. Nickels, dimes, quarters and such like. Seems to me a man spending that much silver is bound to catch attention."

Sheriff Wilkins grunted. "Might if he spent it all in one place, which I doubt." He started back to his car.

My father followed him. "So what it comes down to, you're going to do nothing?"

"I'll do what I can, Mr. Dowell, but the way I see it, ain't very much I can do."

"Then I will, by God! I'll find him. I can't stand to lose forty dollars!"

I noticed then that my father was looking at my mother instead of the sheriff. His look and manner was odd. I felt sure I knew what he was thinking: All right, Mary, you think I'm a failure. We'll just see!

I was old enough to know better, yet I recalled all the stories I'd read in which the hero was considered a failure by either his wife or his girl and he ended up proving them all wrong. My father, who to the best of my knowledge had never read one of those stories, was going to do the same!

The sheriff spat into the dust. "Suit yourself. I'd be a mite careful, was I you. A little old twenty-two can bore a pretty good hole in a man."

He got into his car and drove off.

With the start of school, my father had started staying around the store again. He had expected the school children to pour into the store during lunch and after school for candy and pop. But again it hadn't worked out that way. Oh, a few came in, but the rest just didn't have the money to spend.

Now my father was away every day hunting the robber, leaving my mother to run the store. I quit picking cotton and took over for her after school. For a week my father was gone from early morning until late at night, usually missing supper. At the start of it he said, "If the robber spends the silver, it will be at night, most likely in the beer joints and honky-tonks around the county."

He made no reports on his progress. And I don't think he spoke more than two dozen words to my mother during the whole week.

But that was all right. The hero in the stories never talked about it until his job was done. As for myself, I spent hours that week imagining the scene when he finally caught the robber and came to tell my mother about it. I could see that special radiance blaze in her face.

It was on a Thursday afternoon, one week to the day after the holdup, when I heard the second shot. School was out, and I was alone in the store. My mother had gone up the road to visit a neighbor woman. I was deep in a detective story when the shot sounded. My first thought was of my father's .45. It was gone from under the counter. I suppose I'd known, in the back of my mind, that he'd been carrying it around with him. How else could he capture the robber?

But where had the shot come from?

The schoolhouse! It had come from the schoolhouse!

I hurried to the door. My father's truck was parked in the schoolyard. I ran pell-mell.

I wasn't the first one there. It seemed the whole countryside had heard the shot. Men were pouring in the schoolyard from all directions, and there were men inside when I crowded in.

They were grouped around something on the floor. I saw my father towering over the others. At least he was all right.

I couldn't force my way through, so I finally squatted down and peered through spread legs. Almost as though to accommodate me, there was a shift and a momentary perfect alignment gave me a clear view of Mr. Graham lying on his back on the floor before his desk. He was neatly dressed as always and had one hand still in his pocket.

My father was talking. "I suspicioned him ever since he didn't

come running over the day of the hold-up. Awhile ago I came into the schoolhouse. Not finding him, I thought he'd left for the day. One drawer of his desk was locked. I took a chance and broke it open. And I found this, same sack looks like, with most of the silver still in it."

From where I hunkered down I couldn't see, but I heard the thump and the jangle the sack made as he bounced it on the desk.

A murmur ran through the crowd. Harsh voices commented.

"Who'd ever've thought it?"

"A man like that! Teaching our kids, too!"

"Teachers don't make much money."

"That's no excuse!"

A heavier voice cut in. "Why'd you have to go and shoot him, Henry?"

"Well, sir, that was a funny thing," my father said. "I was looking in the sack when I heard somebody behind me. I reckon he was in the privy out back when I drove up. He started toward me, walking kind of slow, not saying a word. I told him I knew what he'd done, showed him I'd found the money and was bound and determined to turn him over to Sheriff Wilkins. He kept kept coming at me, a kind of crazy look in his eyes. I told him to pull up. He kept coming. Then he stuck a hand down in his pocket. I had no way of knowing what he carried in there—"

The same heavy voice said, "Reckon we'd better find out about that. Stand back, men."

"Hadn't we better wait for Sheriff Wilkins?"

"Ah, Wilkins! What does he know?"

The men moved back, as if by some unconscious design leaving a clear lane toward the door. I got to my feet.

I could see my father clearly for the first time. He stood beside Mr. Graham's desk. On the desk, side by side, rested the paper sack lumpy with coins and the .45.

A man was kneeling on the far side of Mr. Graham. I recognized him as the farmer boarding the schoolteacher. Gently he tugged at the hand in the pocket. It came free. Mr. Graham's hand was closed around something.

The kneeling man pried the fingers apart.

The farmer sat back on his heels, sighing gustily. He pointed a horny thumb. "Seems you were in your rights, Henry."

Horror swept through my veins like a numbing cold. My gaze crawled up to my father's face. He was staring toward the door.

I faced around.

My mother stood a few feet behind me, pale and still. I knew she had seen what was in Mr. Graham's hand.

A knife with an imitation pearl handle, made in the shape of a woman's leg.

ROOM and BOARD

by

MORRIS HERSHMAN

A cautionary tale that hides a mule's kick under its irony

KANE was covering the lower part of his face with a handkerchief when he got out of a cab and walked into a shabby old building by the back entrance. He didn't put the handkerchief away till he was in front of a door with a sign on it that said Room 107—*Private*. Then he knocked.

A woman's voice called, "C'min."

It was a small, dirty room with fly-specked windows. A heavy grey-haired woman back of the scarred desk was talking cheerfully to a man who looked as if he was down to his last penny. In spite of Kane's urgent gestures indicating that he wanted her to get the man out of here, she talked for what seemed like a long time before suggesting that the old guy ought to leave.

Kane locked the door as soon as the other man closed it from the outside, and walked across the small room to pull down the dusty window blind. The woman watched him all that time, drumming a thick hand against one shapeless hip.

"I'm Molly Fleming," she said finally.

"You know who I am," Kane snapped. "You know who told me about this place, and you know what I want."

She nodded. "You want to hole up here. The rent's a hundred a day."

Kane's lips were tight against each other, almost as if he had puckered up for a kiss. "Pretty steep, isn't it?"

"If you don't like my rates, try the Waldorf."

Kane didn't make the sort of cruel remark he'd have passed years ago to a woman who was giving him a hard time. Instead he asked: "What do I get for the money?"

"Food, clothing, and shelter. Especially shelter, which you need pretty badly."

He reached into a pocket of the overcoat he had stolen an hour ago and took a hundred dollar bill out of a thick wallet. The money had come from the place where he'd stashed the loot of his last job, seven years ago. That bill disappeared from Molly's hand before he could get the wallet back in place.

"C'mon upstairs," she said casually, standing up. "I'll take you to the room you're in."

"Just one room?" Kane didn't have much sense of humor but he said something he thought was funny in a grim way. "It sounds like the accommodation I just left."

"If you want to go back instead, I'm sure the warden won't mind a bit." Molly shrugged those tremendous shoulders. "I'll show you the —uh, cell."

She led the way up a narrow creaking staircase. Kane's footsteps and Molly's were loud enough to bring several girls out of small rooms to look him up and down. Molly waved them off.

"Forget about him, girls," she said quickly, "till you hear different."

They turned around almost as if they were part of a regiment, then walked back to their rooms. Molly took Kane to the door of the last room in the back, and opened it.

There was a big old-style bed, an old-style bureau and a Gay Nineties-type mirror with chipped little curves at the edges. One big window showed part of the street below on a mild spring evening.

Molly said, "I'll be here again in a little while," and closed the door on him and locked it.

Kane cursed as he tried to bust the door open, throwing his weight against it half-a-dozen times before he gave up. He was on his way to the window when he heard Molly coming back.

She was walking even more clumsily than usual, this time, because she carried a tray with food. After she had kicked the door shut, she brought the tray over to the bed. She put it down and breathed

softly in relief that the trip was over and done with.

Kane looked annoyed when he saw the tray. "That's how I was eating in prison, off one of those things. I didn't break out and grab the hidden loot from my last job so I could come here and keep eating the same way."

"That's tough."

"Something else bothers me a lot more," Kane said. "You locked the door on me and I don't want that."

"You'll get used to it," Molly told him. "I won't have you on the loose around here, or I might be hauled off to the cooler as an accessory, and I'd sure lose my licence to run a boarding-house. So you stay where you are."

"Get me something to read, at least." He paced the room. "A newspaper and some joke books."

"That'll cost you a buck extra."

"Same price as on the inside," he couldn't help saying. "And I want a radio."

"Twenty bucks for that."

"Standard prices, huh? And I want a suit, a shirt and a tie. This set-up isn't much improvement on what I had."

He paid up, and Molly left. The newspaper came first, and the prison escape story hogged the front page. The cops were saying that they'd have him under arrest again in a few hours.

Kane took off his overcoat at last, then took off the grey prison suit with numbers in black on the left breast. First off he was careful with it, but halfway through the job he started ripping it to shreds. The new green suit Molly had got for him didn't fit half as well, but he told himself that his next suit was going to be a pip, one of those real expensive jobs.

There was a knock on the door at half-past nine, and Molly came in.

She glanced towards the night table. "Play the radio more quietly, will you? This room isn't taken, according to my records."

After Molly brought him breakfast in the morning, Kane decided to kill a little time by cleaning the room just the way he'd have done with his cell. He made the bed, swept, aired the linen and took a few swipes at the window with a dirty rag. He worked a different rag along part of the wall, trying to clean as much of it as he could.

He shaved himself three times during that afternoon and took a bath every hour and a half. He combed his hair so many times he broke the teeth of two combs.

It was his first full day at Molly's.

HE HAD to invent ways of killing time. When he ordered a pair of house slippers—they cost five bucks—he took an hour to make up his mind what color he wanted. When the radio suddenly went on the blink, he tinkered around with it as if he had the slightest idea of

what he was doing and knew one part from another. He didn't, but a few hours had dragged by before he gave up on it and asked for a different radio.

He was giving a lot of thought to the subject of meals. If his phone had worked, he'd have called downstairs to ask Molly what she'd be bringing up next time. He finally hit on the idea of planning meals for himself; but he hadn't decided about as much as one single course by the time Molly panted upstairs with his dinner tray.

"You look nervous," Molly said after she caught her breath.

"I'm in bad shape," he admitted. "This room is as big and dirty as a cell. I can't go out—and this fuzz wouldn't fool nobody yet." He gestured almost angrily towards the ragged-looking mustache he had started to grow.

"Like I told you before," Molly said, hands on hips, "you can always go back if you want."

"Being in this room is like solitary confinement for me. It's going to drive me bughouse if something doesn't happen soon. Do you want to have a nut on your hands?"

"All right," Molly said, giving in for once. "I'll bring you something to pass the time."

What she bought up was a set of checkers and a board. Kane actually played some games by himself before throwing the whole business into a corner on the night table. Molly brought up a set of chessmen next time he complained, along with a book of instructions on how to play the game.

Kane didn't have any patience for that, either. He gave up on it after twenty minutes, and went back to pacing the room. He would take six steps, then turn and take another six steps. He'd only been able to take that many steps across the length of his cell, he remembered.

He didn't sleep much. At about three o'clock in the morning he found himself looking out the window and wishing he was with some old rummy who happened to be swaying across the street just then. There was another tramp outside who looked from here almost exactly like the creep that Molly had been talking to when Kane had first come to this place. If Kane had been a drinking man, he'd have tanked himself up good, this time.

When Molly brought his lunch next afternoon, he told her he couldn't help feeling he was back in prison again.

"What do you want to do?" she demanded. "Hopscotch around town?"

"It's not a bad idea."

"It's a lousy idea," she said firmly. "If nobody but me or a girl here gets to see you, Kane, you're safe. That's what you're paying me for, to make up your mind about how to keep you away from the cops."

"Hell, I have to take a walk once in a while."

"I can't stop you from walking out, Kane, but I won't have you back here if you do. I'm not going to take any extra chances that you might be followed."

Kane made a point of nodding as if he agreed with her, after all. He sounded as if he'd been convinced, as if he'd learned his lesson. He promised he'd try not to give Molly any more trouble.

If he'd had any friends in town, he would probably have asked for advice; as it was, he made up his own mind about stepping out for once in his life. He figured he ought to get something in return for all the misery he'd been through. One night on the town wasn't going to do any harm if he was careful.

He didn't start getting ready for the trip till after dinner. Then he shaved himself, took a bath, shined his shoes two times and got dressed carefully. Listening to a newscast on the radio made him feel even better. For the first time he could remember, his name wasn't mentioned. The heat was easing off. He'd be okay, after all. He would get a job somewhere later on and live quietly. He'd even go to a bug doctor and try to iron out the kinks in him so that he'd be happy from there on.

When he looked out and down the street below, it struck him that many people were doing different things. A boy and girl locked in close embrace not too far off, for instance. Then there was that bum —not the same one who'd been talking to Molly when he'd got here; in the darkness all bums and all cats look alike. This one was sleeping in a store alleyway, a bottle clutched in his hands. Three or four people were sitting around in front of a semi-private house down the block, talking.

Occasionally he could hear a television set growling; Kane had never seen television, and had forgotten to ask Molly for a set. But it wouldn't have helped him much, anyhow.

By half-past eleven he was ready to go. He shut the radio, turned down the window blind and clicked the light off. With a hairpin he'd found in a drawer, he started to work at the lock. Softly, he opened the door—and stopped cold. Molly Fleming stood in front of it, glaring at him. Her hands were clenched as if she was going to hit out. The bamboo-colored eyes were glazed by dislike.

"Get inside, Kane," she snapped. "We've got some talking to do."

He took a step back. She followed him, leaving the door open. Kane got upset at that, and closed it himself. Molly Fleming smiled acidly.

"You want to go out?" she said, taunting him. "Why do you care if the door is open?"

"Never mind that. What do you want? Are you afraid you won't be able to rob me if I take a few steps outside?"

"That's one reason, but there's something else, too," she told him. "I've been trying to make things easy for you and sort of let you think that I was the villain and that whatever might be wrong was all my fault. But now you have to hear the truth."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Listen hard, Kane. You were in jail for years and that makes its mark on a man's will power. It gets rusty. He's not able to think much any more, not able to make decisions."

"I've decided to get away from here for tonight."

"Have you?" She leaned forward. "You've got exactly the sort of deal you're used to. You know what you can do and what you can't. You've got three meals every day and a linen change once a week. And you know you always *can* escape if you get your nerve up. The point is that if you do escape you won't be able to think for yourself any more. You've lost the habit."

"Molly, you're nuts! That isn't what I'm paying a hundred bucks a day for."

"Sure it is," she said firmly. "It's security; the only kind you can really know after so many years in a cage is another cage."

"You're nuts," he said again, more strongly this time. "Watch me get out of here."

"Now that I know you're doing it, Kane, it's not an escape any more." She sighed. "And when you get out there, if you do, you'll have to think for yourself. You'll have to decide where to go, what to do, and how long to keep doing it."

"I'll take care of that."

"All right," Molly nodded. "The heat is pretty well off you by now, and you can come and go as much as you want. If you want to scram out of here, go ahead."

She opened the door again and left it that way as she walked out and down the corridor. Air coming through the open door hit him like something physical, and he fell back. Somebody in the hall was talking, and the noises were so loud he had to cover his ears.

He found himself looking apprehensively above him as if he expected to see guards with machine-guns aimed at him for having broken a rule. His hands started to shake.

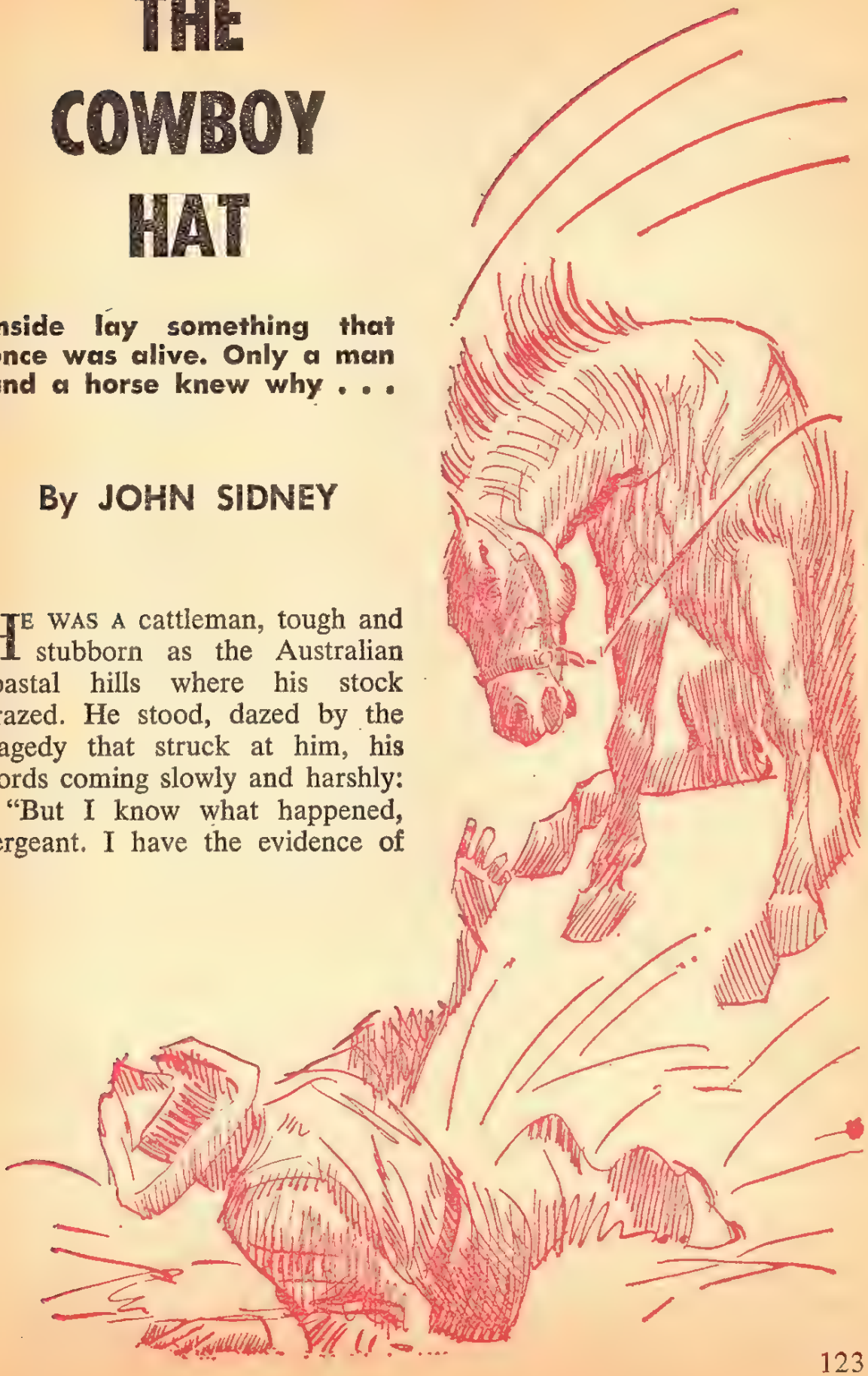
He knew he'd feel worse and worse when he got outside, and he didn't know what was wrong with him. Was he really so scared of making choices that he couldn't give Molly a suggestion for dinner? It had taken him hours to decide what color carpet slippers he wanted. What had happened to him, for Pete's sake? What had they done to him in prison? All he could look forward to was spending the loot from his last job day by day as it was handed over to Molly

(*Concluded on page 128*)

THE COWBOY HAT

Inside lay something that once was alive. Only a man and a horse knew why . . .

By JOHN SIDNEY



HE WAS A cattleman, tough and stubborn as the Australian coastal hills where his stock grazed. He stood, dazed by the tragedy that struck at him, his words coming slowly and harshly:

"But I know what happened, Sergeant. I have the evidence of

my eyes. That bay was well-trained. If Margaret had fallen off, he'd have stood still. Someone jammed her foot in the stirrup when she was unconscious, then lashed the bay on the rump."

He said *"someone"* with ironic hatred. Tom Fisher was fifty, broad in the shoulders, his face tanned with hammocks of wrinkles round the eyes, now brooding, and the mouth, now drawn to a line. That afternoon his daughter and only child had been found with half her head smashed in, her left foot caught in the stirrup, and her horse, sweating and shivering.

"I've sent for a tracker," said the police sergeant. "He'll pick up the tracks and we'll see if anyone was there. The tracker will be able to follow his tracks."

"There was someone there all right," said Tom Fisher. "In a corner of the paddock there were fifty of my steers all lathered up. They had been driven hard. Margaret came along and saw him, so he killed her. Hit her on the back of the head and then jammed her boot in the stirrup. He galloped off then but lost his hat."

The father knew the name of the man he was accusing, but he could not bear to name him. It was the policeman who spoke the name now:

"Johnny Winter says the hat isn't his. And Flanagan swears Winter was at his pub all the afternoon."

The police sergeant shifted restlessly in his saddle, his lean face working with hatred. "That mob all stick together." He spat contemptuously into the summer dust. "A bunch of cattle thieves! I'd give a stripe to catch them. And now this!"

The sergeant was holding a cowboy hat in his hand. It had a leather chin strap and he twirled it round before speaking again. "It's brand new but I'll have a shot to see if I can trace it back to Mr. Flash Johnny Winter. Trouble is there's a rodeo in three weeks and all the young lads have been buying these American cowboy hats."

But the father wasn't listening.

"Margaret would have been twenty-one in another month, on the fifteenth," he was saying. "I was breaking in that chestnut for her." He pointed to the yard, where a two-year-old colt was nervously teetering around in little circles.

"He's a beauty!" said the policeman.

"Come and see him," said the father. The policeman got down from his horse, tied his mount, and followed the father. Tom Fisher opened the gate and waved the policeman into the yard. The chestnut stallion reared away excitedly and then stepped back.

"Gently, boy," called the father to the horse. "He's quite gentle really," he said assuringly to the policeman. "He knows something is wrong, but he's gentle as a lamb.

I was breaking him for the lass."

Tom Fisher was famous in the district for his skill with horses. The chestnut came forward, now quietened by his master's voice, and nuzzled the policeman's hand.

"Superb quarters," said the policeman of the thoroughbred, for he, too, was a horseman, in an area where great horsemen were common. "You could do anything with a horse like that."

The policeman rode away some minutes later. Tom Fisher stood looking at the chestnut.

An hour later a thunderstorm came round the bucket-shaped hills and it began to rain heavily.

"That ruins it for the tracker," said the policeman and cursed roundly and long.

SLEEK, DARK Johnny Winter, swaggering in cowboy chaps at Flanagan's hotel, heard the rain hitting the tin roof and smiled slyly at Flanagan.

The sergeant called on Tom Fisher three weeks later. "Can't get a thing on Winter," he said. "Keep it quiet, but I've had a plain-clothes bloke from the city spending most of his time drinking at Flanagan's. But I think they're wise to him. We've checked on the hat and drawn a blank. It was sold in Weebilla, but the shopkeeper can't remember who bought it. Some stranger, he thinks. We showed him Winter's picture but he wouldn't swear. We're keeping trying, Tom."

The father said: "Don't worry, Bill." He was watching the chestnut. "I'd like that hat if you've finished with it."

The policeman said: "What for?"

"You could call it a souvenir, Bill," said the father.

He was still watching the colt. "I might finish breaking in that fellow to give me something to do." The next morning he rose early and rode into town to collect the hat from the police station.

He began working with the colt and neighbors riding along the road, half a mile from the homestead, heard him calling to the colt and smiled.

"It'll help him to forget and to stop brooding," they said, turning in their saddles. "He took it bad. You know what everyone thinks but you can't prove it. That flash rat, Johnny Winter—"

They heard Tom Fisher constantly thereafter and after a time they shook their heads.

"Tom must have lost his touch since the kid was killed," they said. "I never heard him have trouble before with a colt. Listen to that stallion squealing. The horse is turning sour."

Tom Fisher went to Flanagan's one Saturday afternoon. It surprised everyone because he never went there before.

"That colt is turning out bad,"

he told them. "He may turn out an outlaw."

"Sorry to hear that, Mr. Fisher," said Flanagan, fat and obsequious, one eye on the door because he was afraid Johnny Winter might come in. Flanagan didn't want trouble in his bar.

But Johnny Winter didn't come. One of his cronies in the bar had tipped him off. Johnny was their lord, a position he held by his ability with his fists and in the saddle. He was the acknowledged champion roughrider of the district.

Tom Fisher drank there regularly after that. Sometimes he talked of the colt that was turning out bad and sometimes he didn't.

"I'm set on making a good horse out of him," he said one Saturday afternoon. "It was to have been my girl's horse. He wouldn't have bolted with her."

He went quickly out of the bar after saying that and in the open he clenched his fists and spat hard into the gutter as though there was something nasty on his tongue.

Once he met Johnny Winter, tall, dark and slinking, he nodded but did not speak.

The police sergeant dropped into see the father one day.

"Got another idea about that hat," he said. "Have you still got it?"

"It's over now," said the father.

"I want to get that lad," said the policeman. "I don't care how I do it."

The father went away and returned after some minutes.

"I seem to have misplaced that hat," he said. "I thought I put it in the harness room."

"Well, it doesn't matter," said the policeman. "I don't suppose it would have come to anything. I'll try something else."

"Come and look at the colt," said the father. "He's gone sour."

In the yard the chestnut stallion reared on his hind legs when he saw the men. His eyes rolled back, showing a fierce milk whiteness; he squealed with bared teeth and clawed at the air. He walked forward on rear legs and thundered at the stockyard, hooves smashing at the rails.

"Can't do much with him," said the policeman after a minute.

"I'll send him to the next rodeo company that comes round," said the father. "There's no one in this district who could stick on his back."

"By hang, I'll give it a go," said the policeman laughing. "That's a challenge.

"No!" said the father, loudly. "No, I forbid it!"

The policeman looked hurt and puzzled. "All right," he said slowly. "He's your horse."

The policeman stayed a little longer. Then he rode off, saying, "While I'm here I'll drop in on Flanagan's. I might fluke on to something."

Half a mile away the police-

man's mount jumped suddenly as the chestnut stallion screamed in blinding fury.

The next morning a neighbor, Jim Blake, a noted horseman, rode over to see Tom Fisher.

"I heard about your colt from Sergeant Foyle," he said. "I want a crack at him."

"I'm keeping him for the next rodeo troupe that comes here," said Tom Fisher. "No one here can ride him."

"Let me see if you're right."

"No," said Tom Fisher.

"You got a crush?" said the neighbour. "We could herd him in and try."

"No," said Tom Fisher. "Besides, he's dangerous."

Others came during the next three days to take up the challenge but Tom refused.

On the fourth day Johnny Winter came on a flashy black gelding, swanking in chaps and punched cowboy hat. With him came four of his friends.

"I want a crack at your colt, Mr. Fisher," he said. "I hear you reckon no one round here is good enough."

"No one rides him," said Tom Fisher. "Except, perhaps, myself. He's my horse and I want a good price from the rodeo troupe."

"I want to try him," said Johnny Winter, dark close eyes glinting. He looked round his mob, appraising the respect he was winning in their eyes.

"No," said Tom Fisher. "And I'll trouble you to get off my property."

They went slowly, Johnny Winter looking uncertainly at the other horsemen.

Tom Fisher watched them go and then he mounted a stock horse and took the track leading to the road.

Later that day Sergeant Foyle asked: "Where did Winter and the others go?"

"Down the track," said Tom Fisher. "I thought they were making for Flanagan's, but they must have seen me leave and decided to double back. I told them not to go near the colt."

"I heard that," said the sergeant. He glanced over to the stockyard where a tarpaulin was humped over something. "Mr. Flash Johnny Winter doesn't look so pretty now." He spoke without any emotion. "I've seen some dead men in bad accidents but most of them had more of their faces left. You can only recognize Winter by his clothes."

"I warned him," said the father.

"Tossed him off and then went for him," said the policeman. "Kicked his face in." He nodded towards the stockyard. "We'll take him away."

The father was looking at the bulged tarpaulin, not listening.

"I have no more questions," said the policeman. "There'll be a few at the inquest but nothing to worry about."

He shut up his notebook.

"No more questions," said the policeman in his mind. "There's one I could ask but won't. Maybe I know the answer."

He wouldn't have got an answer to that one. Three nights earlier Tom Fisher had burnt the cowboy hat and its tiara of nails with which he regularly slashed the stallion across the muzzle, goading him into a brain-searing hatred.

The sergeant said, echoing the father's thoughts: "We'll have to shoot the colt, I suppose, though he doesn't deserve it."

ROOM AND BOARD by Morris Hershman

(*Concluded from page 122*)

till he went broke and then—and then—

And then nothing . . .

"I really had a rough time keeping him here," Molly Fleming said.

There was a respectful tone to her voice, even though the man she was talking to looked like a bum. He was the same bum Molly had been talking to at the time Kane had arrived.

The man said, "Between you taking his money and me in the neighborhood twenty-four hours a day to get it from you, we're probably both a pair of nervous wrecks." He smiled wearily. "It takes a cop like me quite a long time, occasionally, to figure out some way of getting back the loot from a robbery; but it's a good feeling when a scheme like this one works out."

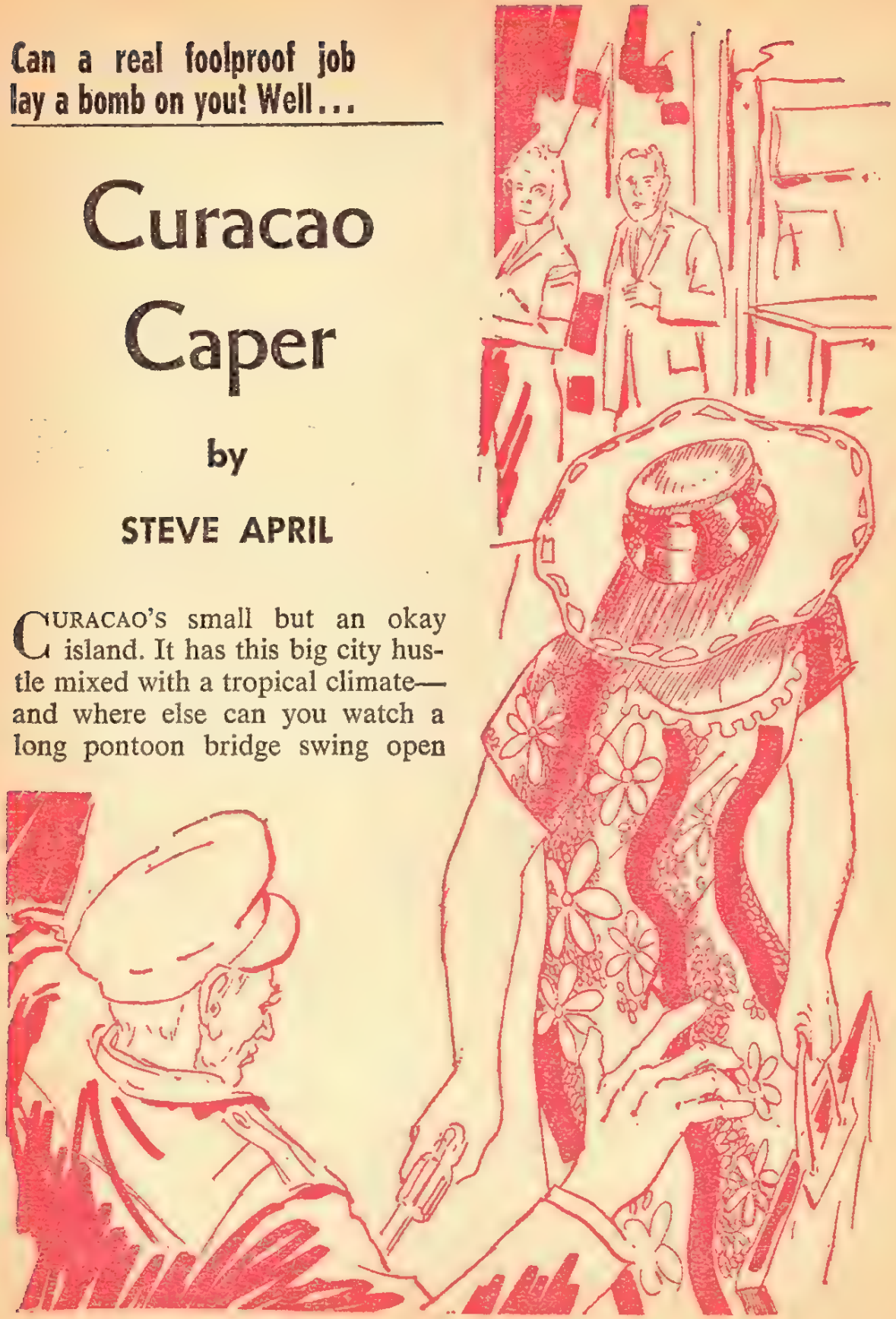
Can a real foolproof job lay a bomb on you! Well...

Curacao Caper

by

STEVE APRIL

CURACAO'S small but an okay island. It has this big city hustle mixed with a tropical climate—and where else can you watch a long pontoon bridge swing open



and see a real ocean liner sail smack up the main drag?

Not that I went for this cruise jive at the start. In my trade you better be around when the action's breaking or you can wind up on the wrong end of a lot of sticks or guns.

I mean, taking a vacation is like when you finish doing time: you have to start over again, wise up to what's been cooking while you were gone.

The Boss is a real sharpie, which is one reason he's never been in stir. Five months ago he told me and Tommy, "I got a good tip the grand jury is looking into our phony meat company. We're in the clean except for the strong-arm stuff you two goons pulled on those small-time butcher shops. If there is a hearing, it won't start until February 10th and I don't want either of you punks around. Go downtown *now* and make reservations for an eighteen day cruise to the West Indies the *S.S. Nomad* will make on February 7th."

"A cruise to the West—what?" Tommy asked, an intense look crossing his rough puss, meaning he's astonished.

"Take your wives along," the Boss went on. "The tab should run about fifteen hundred per couple. I'll pick that up. All you do today is put down a hundred buck deposit each. If the grand jury don't hold the hearing, we got plenty of time to cancel out and you'll get your deposit money back."

"Boss, why take my wife?" Tommy asked. "I got a classy young chippy who would be nuts about a trip—"

"You and Benny are taking your wives, making reservations months in advance so the cruise will look legit, not as if you're ducking a subpoena. Get going."

The hearing on the meat industry was set and while the Boss wasn't sure we'd be called, he's a guy who plays it safe. So that's how me and Lori, Tommy and his potty Anna, had adjoining cabins on this cruise.

It took the tub three days to reach our first stop, Curacao, and from there we were going to a brace of other islands before returning to New York. My wife, Lori, had a ball, but I couldn't see it.

The booze was cheap, but the ship was full of dull clowns. They even had an ex-judge on board, mostly big-mouthed business slobs gassing about this and that great deal they'd swung. Every night I had to dress in a monkey suit for supper although I wasn't anxious to eat—the tub was bouncing like a big yo-yo.

The crazy angle was, my skinny Lori wasn't sick at all, kept going through the menu like she was afraid food was going out of style. But burly Tommy, me and plump Anna were groggy from

the rolling. Tommy didn't win at bingo, or at some dumb kind of horse race game, nor in the daily pool, betting on how many miles the ship would log. Tommy hates to lose, so he had a double grouch going.

But once we reached Curacao the picture changed. We were tied to a dock, so my appetite returned, but strong. The ship's newspaper reported a nasty snow storm back in New York City and it was a kick to be wearing shorts and a sport shirt. There was a tour of the island you could take for six bucks a head but Tommy said that was dumb.

He found out you could rent a drive-it-yourself car for $15.

Maybe you don't know about Curacao: it's a Dutch island and makes a fat buck as an oil refinery, South American oil wells being a couple of miles away. Tourists are another going business. Curacao is a duty-free port and watches and perfume are supposed to be cheap. While I wasn't interested in either, the other passengers really went nuts. They flocked to a shop called Ritzer and Furman, "The Island Jewelers," as if samples were being handed out.

We parked outside in our rented heap, while Lori and Anna were inside shopping, and I never saw anything like this hustle. A biddy would rush out of the store and collar her dumb husband, say, "Give me another five hundred

bucks, honey. I'm buying watches for my mother and sister."

Some of these big executives on our ship came out grinning like kids, three or four expensive watches on their wrists. Or women would stagger out of the other shops, loaded down with boxes of ritzy perfumes, acting like they were Crackerjack boxes.

Tommy shook his thick head as he puffed on a cigar, mumbled, "Benny, they really got a good thing going here. Where the hell are the women?"

"Let's go in and look," I said because the store was air-conditioned and I was sweating in the rented car.

The joint was packed, with one wall, nearest the door, full of cashiers racking up sales faster than the two-buck window at a track. We spotted Anna in her tent-like blue dress in the crowd. Showing Tommy a watch and ring she'd bought for $145, she shouted, "It would cost double that in New York! Tommy, they have this darling diamond pin for only

two hundred seven dollars. Can I buy it?"

"You'd better buy sun glasses!" Tommy growled. "You buy one more thing and I'm going to blacken your dumb eyes!"

Lori had spent $109 buying a watch for herself and one for me, said she wanted to get perfume.

Anna was nagging Tommy about being cheap and I saw he was getting steamed. When he's mad Tommy swings. I said, "Listen, all of you. We can only bring in a hundred bucks each worth of stuff without paying duty. Once you have to pay duty, it's no bargain. There's other islands, other things we'll want to buy, so let's not go over our Customs quota here."

That quieted the gals and we got them out of the store. We rode around the island, the women snapping pictures, although outside the town the place was a bomb. By noon it was hot and I suggested we return to the ship for a swim. Anna agreed, adding, "I got to buy some film on the boat. Three big liners are due in tomorrow and me and Lori want to take snaps of them when that cute bridge on those rowboats swings open."

Tommy, who was sweating it up like a pig, said, "I paid for a whole day on this heap. Let's ride some more."

I told him I'd pay for the car and an hour later we were sipping drinks beside the ship's pool, watching a few bikini babes, while Anna and Lori splashed about in the tiny pool. Tommy asked, "Benny, we sail at noon tomorrow, right?"

"Yeah."

He motioned for me to follow him to the rail, where we were alone. Tommy said, "We can make a small hit here; I figure about two grand each."

"Man, the sun has fried your midget brains."

"Shut up and listen, Benny. This is a foolproof job. You notice anything about that big jewelry store?"

"Yeah, they were doing a heck of a business."

"Be serious. I was casing the place. First, I didn't see any store cops. They only got girls behind the counters and cash registers. There was two floormen who can be packing guns, but that's *all* the protection. And the cashiers are next to the door. Benny, we can knock off the store easy."

"The Boss wouldn't like that and—"

"The Boss is seventeen hundred miles away. This is our deal!"

". . . and we have to go through Customs in the U.S., so what the hell are we going to do with a lot of watches and jewels?"

"Cash, Benny. All cash!" Tommy whispered, puffing on his stinking rope.

"What cash? Most of the people

I saw paid by travelers checks and trying to get rid of them would be messy."

"I never could see why the Boss thinks you're smarter than me. Get this picture, stupid: tomorrow three liners are due, bringing about twenty-five hundred suckers. When they open in the morning Ritzer and Furman have got to have at least five grand in U.S. green in those registers, so they can make change for the tourists. Maybe more. Now, in a small shop I saw cigarette lighters for sale that look like forty-five's. We could go back to town now and buy them. Also arrange to have a rented car waiting for us on the dock tomorrow. They—"

"Tommy, I don't like working in a strange country."

"Shut up and listen. The gals want to be up early tomorrow to take pictures of them liners coming up the main drag, which is a block or two from Ritzer and Furman's street. Okay, we drive them to the bridge and leave 'em there. It has to take at least an hour for the liners to come in; they can't sail too close. While the gals are taking pictures we park near to the store.

"When it opens we go in, cover the cashiers with our phony rods, grab all the U.S. bills and blow. That will take a dozen seconds and the dumb tourists will be rushing for the other counters, won't even know the shop's been hit. We drive back for the gals, return the car and at noon our ship is sailing. Buying?"

"Dummy, this is an island and we look like tourists! All the fuzz has to do is check the ships docked and we're bagged! Nobody could forget your ugly face."

Tommy blew a cloud of smoke at me. "Relax, Benny, that was the first thing I covered. Anna is so damn fat she's about our size, so I borrow two of her bright, long sleeved dresses, floppy hats, make-up and we'll buy some veils. We wear her stockings and sandals. I often use her sandals when I take a shower. We get some padding for our bosoms and what do the gal cashiers see—two big, soggy babes sticking 'em up. Soon as we get back to the car, we wash our faces and change back to shorts and shirts. That will take another few minutes and we'll drive to a side road outside the business district to make the change.

"The bulls are looking for two babes, no accurate discription due to the veils, sunglasses, hats and lot of make-up. Let them look. They ain't holding up no ship's sailing for that, but even if they do, we ain't the feminine type. We'll wear ladies' gloves, too, and we don't talk, just motion with our rods.

"I'll take the cashiers; you cover the floormen. Another angle, the store may not even make a stink. With twenty-five hundred

tourists coming in, they'll do about fifty grand in business. They won't spoil *that* score for a lousy few grand. Benny, this is Hicksville. What can go wrong for pros like us?"

The idea grew on me. It seemed simple and simple jobs always work. My Lori wears wigs and I could use one. The cruise director had given the gals red hair and other make-up junk for the costume ball. The main bit that swung me was I had a hunch the Island Jewelers never *expected* to be held up. The shop had that sort of air about it. The local hoods, if there was any, probably were known to the island cops. Nobody dreams of a tourist pulling a job.

When we told the girls we were going to town so Tommy could buy cigars, they said it was too hot to leave the pool. We took a cab to the business district. The cigarette lighter-guns looked realistic enough and I went in and bought three, along with lotion, postal cards and other souvenirs, so the dark clerk wouldn't especially recall the lighters.

Then we bought veils, ladies' sunglasses, cotton in a drugstore for the breastworks padding, and walked casually around the block outside Ritzer and Furman. The store is on a busy corner, taking up over half of a short block. The street would be full of tourists then and if we parked our rented car near the other corner, dirtied up the plates, we could reach it within fifteen seconds, without running. Rented heaps are all standard models, nothing to remember about ours.

Tommy and I sweated down six blocks along the street the car would be parked on, reached a dirt road, without buildings, leading off to one of the refineries. With any luck we'd have time to change here, drive back for the girls, then act like tourists. I told Tommy we'd put the dresses and other stuff in the shopping bag I was carrying the lighters in, toss it in the water, loaded with rocks, before picking up our wives.

We walked back to the rental agency, where Tommy arranged to have a Ford sedan waiting on our dock at eight the next morning. We taxied to the ship. The gals were still sunning themselves and I warned them about getting too much of a burn. We went to our cabins and Tommy picked out two loud dresses, one orange, the other a bright red, the sandals, stockings, bras and a couple of floppy hats. We put all this in my shopping bag and I hid it under the bunk in my cabin.

We had to dress for dinner that night and then there was a movie the gals wanted to see. We said we'd be at the bar and dashed down to my cabin, tried on the dresses. The fit wasn't bad and with the wigs, hats, veils, gloves and heavy make-up, we really

looked like a couple of old battle-axes.

Tommy said, "In the morning, take a close shave, Benny. And don't slug nobody, unless we have to. That would be a give-away. We'll take a couple of champagne bottles full of water, and towels, with us in the shopping bag, to wipe off the make-up. We'll wear shorts, polo shirts and sneakers, easy to change into."

"Maybe we ought to tell the girls, so, just in case we need it, they could swear we were with them watching the liners come in?"

Tommy shook his head. "Naw, My Anna would get so nervous she'd blow the deal. After we've sailed, I'll give her some story about spilling something on her dress, having to toss them over. I'll give her a couple hundred bucks to buy new rags in Babados and she'll be happy. How we going to get this shopping bag with the dresses off the ship in the morning, without the gals seeing it?"

"They have to be up early by seven-thirty. While they're showering I'll meet you on the dock with the shopping bag. Once you pick up the car, we put it in the trunk. I'll bring along a tube of some gray junk Lori uses on her face every night, it don't help her looks but we can use it to smear the license plates."

Usually I'm as nervous as a barrel of cats before a job, but I slept soundly that night, which was a good sign. We were up at seven and it was easy to put the shopping bag in the car trunk, return to the boat in time for breakfast with the girls. At eight-fifteen we let them off at the pontoon bridge, told them we'd drive around, come back in about an hour.

Speeding to our side road, we changed into the dresses, made-up our faces, checked each other, then drove back to park on the corner near Ritzer and Furman. They didn't open until nine but there already was a crowd of tourists, off our ship, waiting to get in again. Shoving the phony rods up our sleeves, Tommy took the shopping bag.

The car key worried me. We didn't have pocketbooks and I was afraid we'd drop it. We decided to leave the car unlocked, the ignition key in the glove compartment.

I had this sudden fear the heap might be stolen, but there wasn't anything we really could do about that.

We joined the crowd outside the store at a minute before nine. Soon as the doors opened, everybody rushed in like it was a football game, made for the counters. Except us. Tommy went to the cashiers while I walked up to the nearest floor man and when he asked, "Yes, Madame, what can

I do for you?" I jabbed my gun in his belly.

I was standing in front of him, shielding the gun. I didn't see the other floor man. In a few seconds Tommy had the frightened gal cashiers fill the shopping bag with cash, shaking his head at the travelers checks and local money. He walked out and I doubted if anybody else in the store knew it had been hit: all the tourists were fighting to bend over the counters and the sales clerks were busy-busy. Jabbing my sweating floorman in the gut again with my gun, I put a gloved finger to my red lips and walked out.

I tried to walk casually toward the corner. Tommy already had the motor running and we took off, careful not to drive too fast. I didn't hear any shouts, whistles or sirens behind us. The dirt road was empty and we ran into the bushes to rip off our dresses, put on our shorts and shirts, wash our faces and the license plates.

A minor problem came up; the shopping bag was so full of bills, mostly fives and tens. There wasn't any room for the dresses and other junk. I threw them into the trunk of the car, along with the shopping bag, although Tommy wanted to count the loot then and there. We drove slowly back to the bridge, sat in the car as the gals took snaps of the last of the big liners sailing up the river-street. I still didn't hear any sounds of action over on the business street.

At ten the gals said they wanted to go back to the ship. We drove them to the dock, said we'd return the car and be back before noon. They wisecracked about us missing the ship.

Tommy stopped at a small native store and I bought a few souvenir dolls, got a shopping bag with them. Then we stopped at another side road and I shoved the dresses, hats, and other stuff in the new shopping bag, along with some rocks, while Tommy counted the loot, figured we had over seven grand. I covered the top of his shopping bag with the dolls and we drove to the waterfront where there was a lot of island boats selling fish and fruit. I walked up a ways, quietly let the bag with the dresses and rocks sink to the bottom.

We returned the car to the rental place. It was only ten forty-five. We were both sweating, so we calmly stopped at a bar for a cold rum punch, Tommy puffing on his cigar, the shopping bag with the money and dolls between his feet.

Man, the streets were now packed with the tourists off the new liners and we had a time getting a cab. It was only a ten minute ride to our ship and we finally got a cab and were on the dock by eleven-thirty. As we showed our landing cards to the officer at the foot of the gangplank, two uni-

formed cops stepped forward and threw guns on us. We didn't have a chance.

It wasn't until that afternoon I learned what had gone wrong, Lori was put in the cell next to mine for a few minutes and she told me, "Anna was thinking of wearing her orange dress in Barbados, tomorrow. I said I had an orange slack set and she went to her cabin to show me her dress. It was missing. So was her red dress, sandals and some other stuff.

"Naturally, the first person she bawled out was the steward and he took us to the purser. Anna said she was insured against robbery. She'd taken out one of those quickie policies on the dock, when we sailed from New York. The purser said in that case he'd have to make an official report to the Curacao police about an *orange* and *red* dress being missing. The cops said they were looking for two big women wearing orange and red dresses and while we could prove we'd been at the bridge and all that, they asked about you two, and then you came walking on the dock carrying the loot in that shopping bag and—Damn it, Benny, why didn't you at least tell us?"

I like Curacao, but I doubt if I'll like it for the next three to five years, which some horrified joker from the U.S. Embassy assured us we'll get.

COMING! COMING! COMING!

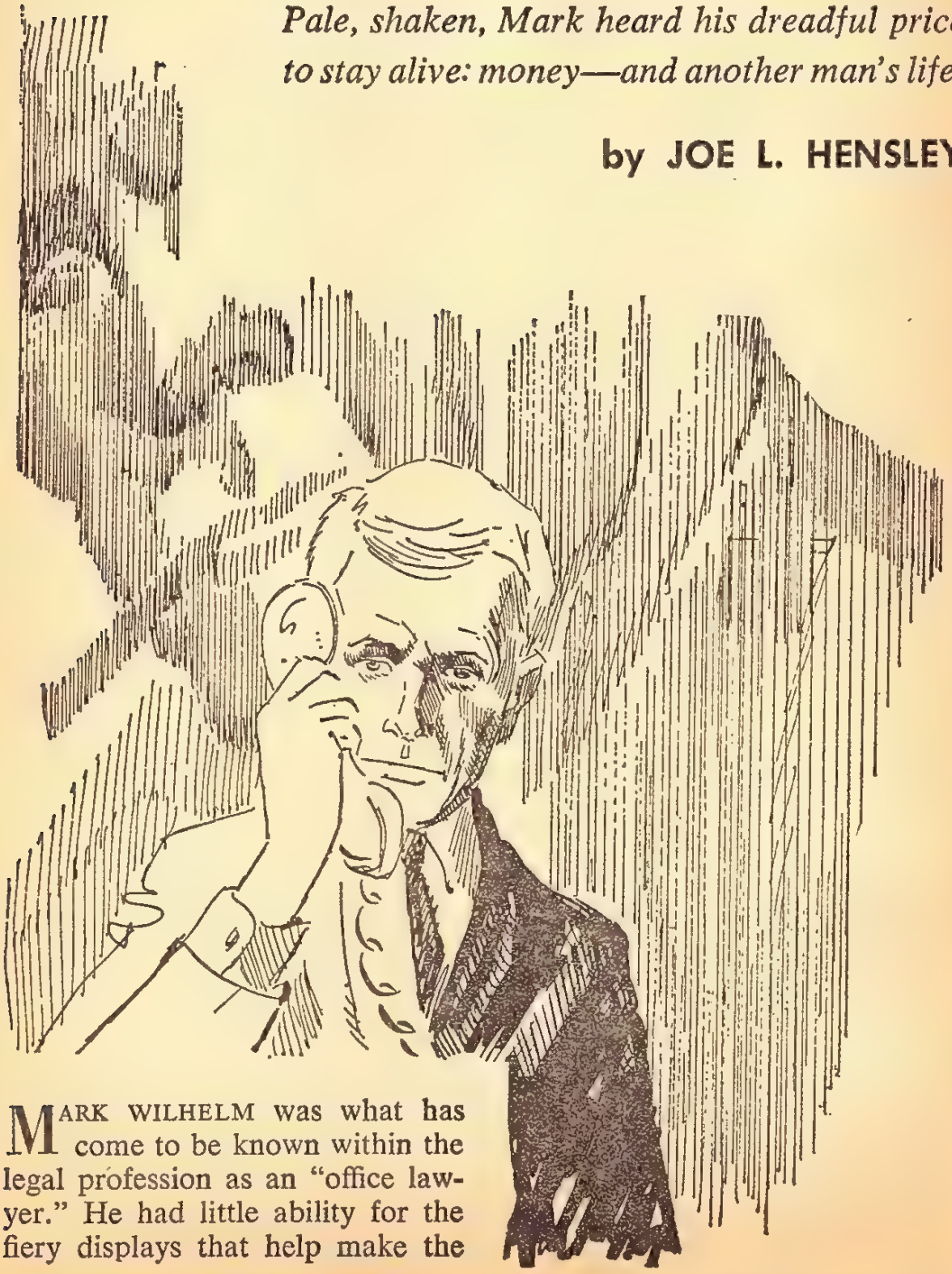
THE GIRL FROM U.N.C.L.E. MAGAZINE

If you are one of the millions who have thrilled to "The Man from U.N.C.L.E." series on video and in our magazine of the same title—and who hasn't?—a new TV-reading treat is in store for you! On Tuesday, Sept. 15, over the N.B.C. network, a sensational new show, "The Girl from U.N.C.L.E." debuts. It will appear every Tuesday, in color, for the entire 1966-67 season. And—a truly gigantic fiction scoop—*"The Girl from U.N.C.L.E. Magazine," written exclusively for you, will follow and become a brilliant companion to "The Man from U.N.C.L.E. Magazine"—surely the greatest spy-adventure twin headliner ever offered anywhere! Remember—"The Girl from U.N.C.L.E. Magazine," like its T.V. counterpart, will be an equally exciting reading bombshell to its famous predecessor—featuring two great new characters, Mark Slate and glamorous April Dancer, in addition to Solo, Kuryakin and Waverly, as they seek and reach new heights of reading excitement in the never-ending war on THRUSH and all forces of Evil—any time, any place, any odds. Watch for "The Girl from U.N.C.L.E. Magazine." Your dealer will feature it. Reserve your copy now!*

One Will Too Many

Pale, shaken, Mark heard his dreadful price to stay alive: money—and another man's life.

by JOE L. HENSLEY



MARK WILHELM was what has come to be known within the legal profession as an "office lawyer." He had little ability for the fiery displays that help make the

personality of a good courtroom tactician. He considered his mind to be too calculating and orderly for feigned heat and loud oratory. He was fairly adept at intricacies, at detail work, and so he existed well on settling estates, on minor tax work, and on abstracting titles to real estate.

He had certain abilities, certain faults. Among the former was his rather distinguished looks when he was dressed in his fine, dark clothes. Those looks made it possible for him to hold closely the attention of a widow when one visited his office, making each female client think that he regarded her as a more-than-friend. And, if sometimes the taste in his mouth was sour, still it was a living.

His practice was centered in a large midwestern town. He liked the town, but it grew cold there in the winter. Very cold. Mark Wilhelm hated cold. He liked to spend those cold months in Florida, but vacation this year had been delayed by lack of funds and other reasons.

The most important reason was with him now on long distance telephone.

"We haven't seen you. You've owed us more than forty thousand for almost a year," said the smooth voice that brought remembrance of daquiris and sun tans and horses that ran fast, but not fast enough. "When can we expect to get it? I rather dislike making these calls and I don't intend to call *you* again."

Mark's hands were wet and slippery as he held the phone.

"You know very well that gambling debts aren't legally collectible," he said weakly.

"Maybe they aren't in your business, but I'd hate to think they weren't in mine," the voice said, small slivers of steel beginning to show.

"Are you threatening me?" Mark asked, trying to raise the temperature of his voice with small success.

"Of course," the voice said. "That's exactly what I'm doing."

Mark started to re-hang the telephone and got it all of an inch from his ear when resolve faded and fear came on. "I've got to have some time to raise that kind of money."

"I'll give you thirty days. If you don't have it then, I believe I'll assume you're never going to have it and proceed accordingly. One of my associates will call thirty days from today. Have the money ready for him."

Mark hung the phone up carefully and sat at his over-size desk thinking. He did not dislike himself for his compulsion to gamble. When you spent your working days around an office trying to make old women happy so you could write their wills and settle their estates when they died, a man deserved some bright lights and excitement when vacationing in Florida.

But last year he'd really gone off the deep end. Forty thousand dollars—.

The opportunity offered itself the very next day. Mrs. Belle Rivers, a widow with cold, clutching hands, who had more money than the rest of Mark's menage together, died. And the nice part was that he didn't even have to help her along, as he'd done once or twice with other clients. Not really murder them, of course. Just leave a bottle of sleeping pills close when they were in pain, or that one time when he'd stolen Mrs. Jaymon's heart medicine.

Mrs. Rivera, Mark remembered well, was an eccentric lady with no close relatives who had doted strongly on Mark. He, in turn, had held her hand and his breath and waxed eloquent for her for years. And she'd trusted him.

Mark's main fault was that he was dishonest. It was a compelling dishonesty that would seldom allow him to complete a transaction without getting something that was not his.

In Mrs. Rivera's estate the fee for settlement, he computed, would be almost enough to pay his gambling debt, but it would leave nothing for another trip to Florida. The weather was growing cold and he longed for the warmth of the southern sun. Besides he wouldn't be able to draw against the attorney's fee for at least six months. The probate commissioner was very strict about that. Also he owed the bank a great deal of money and they'd move in on the major part of the fee.

He sat in his office thinking for a long time. Finally the idea came.

First of all he called her bank and his, the one that he usually worked with, and asked to speak to John Sims.

"Mrs. Rivera died this morning," he said to Sims. "Terrible loss. I've her will here in my office. She named your bank as executor and myself as attorney. I trust that's satisfactory?"

Sims happily assured him that the bank would be most willing to work with him in the matter.

"I'll probate her will this afternoon," Mark told him. "There were two copies and I've retained both of them here in my office."

"That's unusual," Sims said.

"She trusted me implicitly," Mark said, putting a little ice in his voice. "She felt her will would be safer in my office than at her home. As you may know she had become increasingly deaf and her sight was poor and she was afraid that her servants might try to pry into her affairs."

"I see," Sims said, his voice satisfied.

Mark hung up the phone with relief, that part accomplished. What he'd said was perfectly true. Mrs. Rivera had left both copies of her will in his office. Now to change that will. But first he would have to

contact his old associate, Alvin Light.

Alvin would be perfect for the idea he had in mind.

He told his idiot office girl he'd be out the rest of the morning and left.

The office girl had been chosen for two reasons. She was ugly and made none of his old lady friends jealous. Secondly she was stupid and never noticed any of Mark's mistakes.

He found Alvin in a third-class bar doing what he was best at since he'd been disbarred—drinking. Outside the bar, though, before he went in, he watched with interest as an ambulance pulled up and loaded an old bum who lay tattered and supine in the gutter. None of the other bums paid much attention.

Mark heard one ambulance attendant grumble to the other: "Dead. This cold weather really gets to them."

The scene caught at something in his mind, an addition to the original idea. He stood thinking for a moment, then went into the bar. Alvin was holding drunken court in the back of the bar, but he shooed the bums away when Mark appeared.

Before Alvin's downfall for bribing a member of a petit jury and getting caught at it, the two had sliced up many a client between them. And even though Alvin was now a vile smelling alcoholic, intelligence still showed dimly in his eyes.

Mark got him away from the bar and into the car.

"How'd you like to make fifty thousand dollars?" he asked.

Alvin's red eyes flickered. "I'd like it. Not for me so much. I'm smart enough to know what I am. But I'd like it for my boy. He hates my guts, but he's still my son. He's in medical school now, in California. He's married with a couple of kids I've never seen. He hasn't got any money and he's going to have to drop out of school and go to work when this year is over. Enough money would see him through; the rest should buy me enough whisky to finish killing me."

He looked up at Mark sharply. "What have you got going, Mark? I have to admire you, you know. I was a crook because I thought it was smart—you're dishonest because you're completely amoral—everything revolves around you." He sighed. "You've been luckier than I—a long time being caught."

Mark ignored the comment and went to the point: "You used to do Mrs. Rivera's work, didn't you?"

Alvin nodded. "She was a client of mine before you came along with your phony charm."

"She died," Mark said softly. "What if there was a bequest for a hundred thousand dollars to you in her will?"

"You mean there is one?"

"Not yet," Mark said smiling. "But I have all copies of the will in my office and no one has seen them but me."

"I get fifty?"

"Same way we always went. Fifty-fifty." It was easy to say it. But there would be no split.

"How about witnesses to the will?"

"I was one. The other was my office girl. I didn't pick her for her brains. She's so dumb she has trouble remembering her own name. Besides, I typed the will and all she ever saw was the last page."

Alvin eyed him shrewdly and nodded. "Fifty thousand dollars is more than I'll ever need. Why so much for me? I might have gone for less."

"We've always gotten along at the even split," Mark said smoothly.

Alvin smiled. "Don't try to cross me on this, Mark. I need that money for my boy."

THE rest was easy.

All he had to do was carefully take the staples out of the will, align the paper and insert, at the bottom of a page, among Mrs. Rivera's long list of specific bequests, a hundred thousand dollar one to Alvin Light, for "his past services to me and his present necessity." He would have preferred leaving it to himself, but that would be illegal, since he had drawn up and witnessed the will.

Then he probated the will.

The next four weeks went very smoothly. Mark lost himself in the intricacies of Mrs. Rivera's various problems. Final state and federal returns, inheritance tax schedules, waivers, inventories—nice detail work of the type in which he excelled.

Because Mrs. Rivera had died with a great deal of money and no close relatives, none of her heirs questioned her bequests. There was plenty for all. John Sims, probate officer at the bank, raised an eyebrow at Mark when he read the bequest to Alvin Light, but Mark pretended not to notice.

And so on the beautiful, but now very cold twenty-ninth day after Mark's long distance telephone call, Alvin, armed with a check properly signed by John Sims, cashed that check, while Mark waited outside around the corner. Alvin was gone for a long time, but Mark was patient, if nervous.

When it was done they went back to Mark's office with a satchel

containing a hundred thousand dollars and Mark got out a bottle of very good bourbon and poured two drinks. He said: "This is the kind of day to be in Florida. Cold!" He shivered. "Drink some of this to warm you."

Alvin eyed the whisky and Mark dubiously. "Just the one," he said.

"Of course," Mark said and then watched while the one became two and then ten and conversation moved from old stories to monosyllables.

Everything went as planned. Mark thought of the whole hundred thousand and warm climates. He rationalized by realizing that Alvin couldn't be trusted. Alvin was an alcoholic and vain and sooner or later an alcoholic would part with any secret. And fifty thousand saved is an enormous saving.

After Alvin was suitably bespotted Mark put him in the car, first carefully removing the money in Alvin's battered briefcase. He put most of this in his safe to pay the emissary of the gamblers and for his own future use. A few bills he kept for further use during the night.

He took Alvin to an even worse neighborhood than the one he'd originally visited the old lawyer in —a neighborhood known for muggings and knifings and doctored whisky—and, of course, dead bums in the alleys.

Once, on the way, Alvin's eyes opened a little and Mark heard him whisper: "Don't cross me— The will—" and some gibberish following that.

Mark smiled and stopped his car in a deserted place and poured more whisky down the weak old throat. Then he drove on. It was very cold outside and a light snow was falling. The car's heater could barely compensate. It was the kind of night to be heading south.

He dumped the older man in a little used alley. This was the difficult and dangerous part, but Mark had been over the neighborhood thoroughly, figuring his chances, knowing they were good. He poured water he'd brought from the office over Alvin's sodden body, watchfully listening to distant street noises, careful and alert.

Alvin did not move when the water cascaded down. The snow was falling in a near blizzard now and the weather was very cold. He dragged Alvin behind a group of garbage cans and boxes. Twice more, during the night, he came back with more water, but the second trip was unnecessary. Alvin was dead.

Of course there would be a furor about the hundred thousand dollars, but not the kind that a murder brings. Mark rehearsed his lines in his mind: "I told him to leave it with me or put it in a bank, but he was drunk. After all, he's been taking care of himself for a long time."

The hundred thousand could

easily have been stolen by one of the toughs in the neighborhood. Mark scattered a few bills he'd kept for that purpose underneath the body and in Alvin's pockets.

The man from the Miami gambler came at eleven the next day. Mark had purposely let his office girl, "Dumb Dora," have the morning off.

The man was a nervous little wreck with a tic under his right eye and the face of a fallen saint. Mark smiled and escorted him to the inner office.

"You've got the money?" the little man asked.

Mark nodded and opened the safe and began counting it out in neat piles, hurrying, wanting to get this part done quickly.

"Good man," the nervous one said. "They were sure you weren't going to be able to come up with it. I'll have to get to a phone and call a certain number very soon now."

Mark increased the speed of his counting.

The interruption came then. Mark's door opened.

John Sims, the bank probate officer, was there. He had one of the uniformed guards with him.

"Sorry to break in, but there wasn't anyone in the outer office." Sims nodded apologetically at the little gambler's emissary. "This is important. They found poor Alvin Light's body in an alley a little while ago. Poor man had frozen to death."

Mark nodded, maintaining his composure. "Drinking too damned much."

Sims looked down at the desk, seeing the neat piles of money, and his face became curious. "I'm carrying out instructions. Alvin left a will with me yesterday when he picked up the money. Named the bank executor and you as attorney. He had me copy down all of the numbers and mark the wrappers of money I gave him yesterday. He stated in the will that if he should die suddenly I should come to you for the money immediately, that you would have it."

Sims looked down at the desk again and his face went blank. "Why, that looks like some of it there! I recognize the wrappers. You weren't going to use it, were you?" He picked up the neat bundles and handed them to the guard. "Alvin left the money to his son."

The nervous little man with the lost eyes sidled out of the office, while Sims and the guard gathered the money from the desk and safe. Mark tried to say something, to think of something.

Nothing came. Nothing at all.

Not *that* day anyway.

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